

ABSTRACT

“The Theological Necessity of the Investigative Judgment: Albion Ballenger and His Failed Quest to Subvert the Doctrine—Part I”— Throughout the history of Seventh-day Adventists, the investigative (or pre-advent) judgment has been one of the most controversial doctrines, challenged and questioned more than any other Adventist belief. This paper explores the reasons critics of Adventism, and particularly Albion Fox Ballenger, object to the doctrine of the investigative judgment. Ballenger was an ex-Adventist minister and one of the strongest critics of Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary during the first part of the 20th century. All other criticism of the doctrine, and particularly of the investigative judgment, go back to Ballenger. This paper is the first of a two-part series on the investigative judgment. The first part offers an abridged exposition of Ballenger’s soteriology and his critique of the investigative judgment doctrine. The second article will conclude with a theological analysis of the critique of the doctrine advanced by Ballenger and his evangelical followers in the context a broader understanding of Protestant soteriology.

Keywords: Albion Ballenger, investigative judgment, soteriology, monergism, synergism

RESUMEN

“La necesidad teológica del juicio investigador: Albion Ballenger y su fallido intento por socavar la doctrina – Parte I”— A lo largo de la historia de los adventistas del séptimo día, el juicio investigador (o juicio pre advenimiento) ha sido una de las doctrinas más controvertidas, desafiada y cuestionada más que cualquier otra creencia adventista. Este artículo explora las razones por las que los críticos del adventismo, y en particular Albion Fox Ballenger, objetan la doctrina del juicio investigador. Ballenger fue un ministro adventista que se convirtió en uno de los críticos más fuertes de la doctrina adventista del santuario durante la primera parte del siglo XX. Todas las demás críticas a la doctrina, y en particular al juicio investigador, se remontan a Ballenger. Este artículo es la primera parte de una serie de dos sobre el juicio investigador. La primera parte ofrece una exposición abreviada de la soteriología de Ballenger y de su crítica de la doctrina del juicio investigador. El segundo artículo concluirá con un análisis teológico de la crítica de la doctrina propuesta por Ballenger y sus seguidores evangélicos en el contexto de una comprensión más amplia de la soteriología protestante.

Palabras clave: Albion Ballenger, juicio investigador, soteriología, monergismo, sinergismo

THE THEOLOGICAL NECESSITY OF THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT: ALBION BALLENGER AND HIS FAILED QUEST TO SUBVERT THE DOCTRINE—PART I*

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Introduction

The investigative judgment doctrine has always been an intrinsic part of Seventh-day Adventist soteriology. According to this theology, the investigative judgment forms the first phase of the eschatological judgment, having commenced in 1844 at the end of the prophetic periods of the 1260 years of Dan 7 and the 2300 years of Dan 8. The proceedings of this judgment were inaugurated by the triumphal entry of Christ into the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary.¹

Throughout the history of Seventh-day Adventists, however, the investigative (or pre-advent) judgment has been one of the most controversial doctrines, challenged and questioned more than any other Adventist belief. One of the reasons for the doctrine's controversial nature may lie in the fact that it is directly related to the doctrine of salvation, the means of which have been hotly debated throughout the history of Christianity.

Various interpretations of the way humans are redeemed have led to conflicting opinions about the investigative judgment. For many—especially those coming from within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination—this doctrine is indispensable, as it is irrevocably related to the human response to God's plan of salvation. Those outside of Adventism, however, regularly challenge the doctrine, at times proclaiming Seventh-day Adventism as a heretical sect that teaches a

* The first version of this paper was originally presented at the 4th International Bible Conference “Biblical Eschatology from an Adventist Perspective,” held in Rome on June 11–20, 2018.

1. C. Mervyn Maxwell, “The Investigative Judgment: Its Early Developments,” in *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 5 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 119–157; cf. Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Theology of Divine Judgment in the Bible: A Study of God's Past, Present, and Future judgments and Their Implications for Mankind,” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/judgment%20in%20bible.pdf>.

legalistic understanding of salvation. A salvation scheme involving the investigative judgment doctrine thus becomes contrasted with salvation understood as *sola gratia et fides* (“by grace and faith alone”).² A perusal of various critical evaluations of Adventism found in print and online, and especially those associated with modern evangelicalism, results in the impression that Adventism is all about investigative judgment and salvation by works. True and honest believers, it is believed, need to be rescued from the manipulative grip of cultic Adventism and introduced to the true evangelical faith, which eschews human works as the means of salvation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that under growing external pressure some Adventists have abandoned the doctrine of the investigative judgment, considering it a relic of the past and an embarrassment. For others, this doctrine has been the catalyst for abandoning the Adventist faith.³

Evangelical criticism of the investigative judgment doctrine generally centers around four main objections. First, it is often argued that historicism—a method of interpretation that has been normative among Seventh-day Adventists—is no longer viable. Various weaknesses are often highlighted in contemporary literature, substantiating that claim. Most critics of historicist methodology highlight its practitioners’ tendency toward speculation and conjecture, and their inability to furnish a uniform interpretation of symbols. Moreover, spurred by contemporary ecumenical climate, some detractors object to the historicist insistence on identifying the antichrist, Babylon, and the beast of Rev 13 with modern Roman Catholicism and the papacy.⁴

2. Laura Lee Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 84.

3. See, e.g., Jerry Gladson, *Out of Adventism: A Theologian’s Journey* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

4. Ovid Need, *Death of the Church Victorious* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace, 2004), 431; cf. Anthony Charles Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Camano Island, WA: Spirit and Truth, 2004), 1:120–122; C. Marvin Pate, *Reading Revelation: A Comparison of Four Interpretive Translations of the Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 9; cf. Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 40. While strongly affirming historicism, Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 11, writes that “the historicist approach is sometimes problematic because of the effort to fit every detail of the text into a historical fulfillment. The exposition of the text for many historicists is based primarily on the allegorical method, rather than on adequate Old Testa-

A historicist approach to prophetic interpretation, it is often claimed, is not relevant to a postmodern worldview. In response to these criticisms, Adventist writers such as LeRoy Edwin Froom, Kenneth A. Strand, Jon Paulien, Richard M. Davidson, Ranko Stefanovic, and others defend the validity of the historicist approach as the norm of prophetic interpretation.⁵

Second, critics contend that the doctrine of the investigative judgment cannot be “sustained from the biblical text.”⁶ One theologian writes that the investigative judgment “is the most colossal, psychological, face-saving phenomenon in religious history.” He goes on to say that he does “not believe that there is a suspicion of a verse in Scripture to sustain such a peculiar position.”⁷ In response to claims such as these, Adventist scholars including C. Mervyn Maxwell, Jan Paulsen, Marvin Moore,⁸ and others have mounted a vigorous defense of the biblical foundation underlying the doctrine of the investigative judgment.

Third, critics claim that the doctrine has a detrimental effect on the assurance of salvation. It is often perceived by critics that forgiveness is not true forgiveness if a person’s life is subject to review. “Taken at face value,” one critic asserts, “the investigative judgment robs

ment background. Also, the explanation of symbols employed in the books is often derived from newspaper articles and history books, rather than from the Bible.”

5. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1950), 1:17–34; Kenneth A. Strand, “Two Aspects of Babylon’s Judgment Portrayed in Revelation 18,” *AUSS* 20, no. 1 (1982): 53–60; Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 3–34; Jon Paulien, “The End of Historicism: Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic: Part One,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society (JATS)* 14, no. 2 (2003): 15–43; Paulien, “The End of Historicism: Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic: Part Two,” *JATS* 17, no. 1 (2006): 180–208; Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Principles for Interpreting Apocalyptic Prophecy,” in *Prophetic Principles: Crucial Exegetical, Theological, Historical, & Practical Insights*, ed. Ron du Preez (Lansing, MI: Michigan Conference, 2007), 52–55; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 10–12.

6. Gladson, *Out of Adventism*, 116.

7. Raymond F. Cottrell, quoted in Gladson, *Out of Adventism*, 115.

8. Maxwell, “The Investigative Judgment,” 119–157; Jan Paulsen, “Sanctuary and Judgment,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 275–294; Marvin Moore, *The Case for the Investigative Judgment: Its Biblical Foundation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010).

a person of any real assurance about personal standing with God.”⁹ Writers such as Jiří Moskala, Davidson, Woodrow Whidden, and Gordon Kainer address this objection.¹⁰

Fourth, critics assert that the investigative judgment doctrine “jeopardizes the Biblical teaching that we are saved by grace alone.”¹¹ A careful and unbiased reading of Ellen G. White’s *Steps to Christ*,¹² *Faith and Works*,¹³ and other writings on justification by faith¹⁴ should dispel the mistaken notion that Adventists believe in salvation by works. The meaning of the phrase “grace alone” and how it can be interpreted according to different theological paradigms will be addressed in the final part of this study.

Finally, critics argue that the doctrine of the investigative judgment is theologically redundant and should be discarded. The only purpose of this “unique theory,” writes Adventist critic Walter Martin, is “to discipline Christians by the threat of impending judgment and condemnation upon those whose cases are decided upon unfavorably by our Lord.”¹⁵ The doctrine, Martin asserts, “cannot be substantiated by exegesis but rest[s] largely upon inference and deduction drawn from theological applications of their own design.”¹⁶ Adventists, he

9. Gladson, *Out of Adventism*, 94; cf. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 80.

10. Jiří Moskala, “Toward a Biblical Theology of God’s Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of a Theocentric-Christocentric Approach),” *JATS* 15, no. 1 (2004): 152–155; Jiří Moskala, “The Gospel According to God’s Judgment: Judgment as Salvation,” *JATS* 22, no. 1 (2011): 28–49; Richard M. Davidson, “Assurance in the Judgment,” in *Salvation: Contours of Adventist Soteriology*, ed. Martin F. Hanna, Darius W. Jankiewicz, and John W. Reeve (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018), 395–416; Woodrow Whidden II, *The Judgment and Assurance: The Dynamics of Personal Salvation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2012); Gordon Kainer, *Judgment: Great News or Dreaded Dilemma?* (self-pub., 2014).

11. Hoekema, *Seventh-day Adventism*, 84.

12. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1956).

13. Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979).

14. Ellen G. White, “Justification by Faith,” in *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1986), 389–398; cf. A. G. Daniells, *Christ Our Righteousness: A Study of the Principles of Righteousness by Faith as Set Forth in the Word of God and the Writings of the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, 1941).

15. Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1997), 581.

16. Walter Martin, *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 176.

suggests, “needlessly subscribe to a doctrine that neither solves their difficulties nor engenders peace of mind.”¹⁷ Martin thus concludes that Adventism would be well served, and perhaps gain greater acceptance among evangelicals, if the doctrine were discarded. Similar attitudes toward the doctrine of the investigative judgment may be found even among evangelical critics sympathetic toward Seventh-day Adventism. This last objection—that the *sola gratia et fides* principle makes the investigative judgment doctrine redundant—is the primary focus of this study.

A perusal of books and online materials critical of the investigative judgment doctrine reveal similar reasoning and argumentation repeated over and over again. It would appear that much of the theological opposition to the investigative judgment, especially that of former Adventists, finds its source in Albion Fox Ballenger, an ex-Adventist minister who died in 1921. His arguments—whether he is mentioned by name or not—continue to resurface in anti-investigative judgment polemic, both in print and online.

Thus, in order to understand the contemporary critique of the investigative judgment doctrine, it is helpful to first explore the theological context of Ballenger’s critique. This article is the first of a two-part study. The first one will begin with a brief biography of Ballenger. It will then explore traditional Adventist teachings of the investigative judgment in order to flesh out what Ballenger was most opposed to. This will be followed by an abridged exposition of Ballenger’s soteriology and his critique of the investigative judgment doctrine. The second article of this study will conclude with a theological analysis of the critique of the doctrine advanced by Ballenger and his evangelical followers in the context a broader understanding of Protestant soteriology.

A Short Biography of Albion Fox Ballenger

Albion Fox Ballenger (1861–1921) was arguably one of the most important players in the theological war over the investigative

17. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 587; Martin, *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, 218, 227, 236. Donald Barnhouse, “Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?” *Eternity*, September 1956, 44, writes about this doctrine of the investigative judgment: “To me, [it] is the most colossal, psychological, face-saving phenomenon in religious history!” Cf. Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel, Cults, Alternative Religions, and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 16.

judgment in Adventist history. While working as a minister in the United Kingdom in the early 1900s, his Adventist beliefs were challenged by former Adventist evangelists who had abandoned the faith. He thus decided to study the doctrine of the atonement and sanctuary for himself, ultimately resulting in his reinterpretation of these teachings.¹⁸ A denominational inquiry during the 1905 General Conference Session found his teachings incongruent with Seventh-day Adventist theology, and Ballenger was asked to refrain from propagating his views. His refusal led to the removal of his ministerial credentials, and his working association with the Seventh-day Adventist Church ceased.¹⁹

In his writings, however, Ballenger continued to argue against the Adventist positions on the atonement, sanctuary, and investigative judgment, especially while he was editor of the *Gathering Call* (1913–1921). In particular, he labeled the investigative judgment doctrine as unbiblical and anti-gospel.²⁰ After his death in 1921, his brother E. S. Ballenger, also an ex-Adventist minister, took over the paper and continued Albion's quest. It was from his pen that the harshest criticisms of the doctrine of the investigative judgment were issued.²¹ Today, Albion Ballenger's teachings against the investigative judgment form the foundation upon which much of the contemporary criticism of the doctrine is built.

18. Calvin W. Edwards and Gary Land, *Seeker After Light: A. F. Ballenger, Adventism, and American Christianity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2000), 77. This book is strongly recommended for anyone interested in Albion Fox Ballenger and the history of his conflict with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

19. *Ibid.*, 131–143.

20. Arnold V. Wallenkampf, "A Brief Review of Some of the Internal and External Challenges to the Seventh-day Adventist Teachings on the Sanctuary and the Atonement," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Theological Studies*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1981), 591, writes, "Ballenger . . . studied and thought through the SDA teachings on the investigative judgment and decided that [he] could not find a personally satisfactory biblical foundation for them." Roy Adams, "The Doctrine of the Sanctuary in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Three Approaches" (ThD diss., Andrews University, 1980), 136, agrees, but correctly observes that Ballenger's repudiation of the investigative judgment occurred gradually, as he was developing his interpretation of the sanctuary doctrine.

21. See Albion's brother, E. S. Ballenger, *Important Facts about the Seventh-day Adventist Creed that Need Attention* (Riverside, CA: Private Press, n.d.), 18, who writes, "The doctrine of the investigative judgment, is one of the cardinal pillars in the creed of the SDA's. It is entirely devoid of any Biblical proof. In fact, it is altogether contrary to the teachings of the Bible."

In his attempt to undermine the investigative judgment doctrine, Ballenger had first attempted to reinterpret Adventist teachings on the atonement. He believed that a reinterpretation of this doctrine would provide a sound foundation for rejecting the investigative judgment. As will become evident, however, Ballenger failed in his quest because the theological meta-paradigm of his choice *would not allow for it*. What follows is a description and analysis of Ballenger's attempt to eliminate the investigative judgment within the context of his soteriology, as well as a discussion of the reasons why it was not possible for him to abandon the doctrine, despite his rhetoric.

In order to understand and evaluate Ballenger's anti-investigative judgment position—and thus much of contemporary evangelical criticism of the doctrine—it is first necessary to define and describe the ideas he was opposed to. This study thus begins with a brief description of early Adventist notions of the investigative judgment, particularly those of Uriah Smith and Ellen G. White, followed by a description of twentieth-century Adventist understandings of the topic. This will be followed by an exposition of Ballenger's teachings on sin, atonement, and the investigative judgment, all of which ultimately led to his rejection of Adventism.

A Brief Review of the Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of the Investigative Judgment

Uriah Smith

Smith, a foremost theologian of early Adventism, is often credited with developing a systematic doctrine of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment. In his understanding, the investigative judgment is part of a greater antitypical fulfillment of the sanctuary services of the OT. The first-apartment ministry in the earthly sanctuary points to Christ's work as High Priest on behalf of His people, from His ascension to 1844. The second-apartment ministry, the typical Day of Atonement, points to Christ's work in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary. According to a prophetic interpretation of Dan 7 and 8, this phase of Christ's ministry began in 1844 and formed the initial work of the judgment that precedes His second coming.²² Just as the sanctuary in the OT is cleansed on the Day of Atonement, in

22. Uriah Smith, "The Great Central Subject," *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1881, 328.

the same way, during the antitypical Day of Atonement, the heavenly sanctuary is cleansed and the sins of God's professed people are blotted out. But according to Smith, in order for this process to be completed, there must be an examination of the lives of God's people. "Every individual of every generation from the beginning of the world, who has ever become interested in the work of Christ, thus passes in review before the great tribunal above."²³

Smith's understanding of this review was based on his interpretation of what happened on the cross. Rather than being "atonement for sins," Christ's death on the cross was only an "offering for sin."²⁴ As an "offering for sin," Christ acted for the whole world. In His capacity as High Priest, however, which began after His ascension to heaven,²⁵ He acts only for His people.²⁶ As such, it is necessary for God to review the lives of all His people. If it can be shown that they had maintained Christian lives, then their sins will be blotted out, their "names . . . retained in the Lamb's book of life," and the Savior will confess "their names to the Father as those who have accepted of salvation through him."²⁷

Ellen G. White

Similarly, for Ellen G. White the typical Day of Atonement signifies the closing work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. On the Day of Atonement, the work of the first apartment ceased and the ministration of the second apartment began. The High Priest entered the Most Holy Place in order to present before God the blood of the sin

23. Uriah Smith, *Looking Unto Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Review & Herald, 1898), 224.

24. Uriah Smith, "The Atonement," *Review and Herald*, January 30, 1894, 70.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Smith, "The Great Central Subject," 328. Smith, "The Atonement," 70, writes, "Therefore, though he bore on the cross the sins of all the world, that is, made a sacrifice which would be of sufficient merit to cover and cancel all the sins of every person who has ever lived, or is to live, on this earth, it does not follow that all will be saved; for all will not come to him that they might have life. . . . But for all who will come to him and seek and accept his pardon, he will grant it on the strength of his sacrifice, and make atonement for their sins."

27. Smith, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 223. Smith, *Daniel and Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1949), 641–642, compares the closing work of the sanctuary to the examination of the guests from Jesus' parable of Matt 22, "to see who have on the wedding garment. Consequently, until this work is finished, it is not determined who are 'ready' to go in to the marriage."

offering that washed away the sins of those Israelites who had “truly repented of their sins.”²⁸

In the same way, in the antitypical Day of Atonement, which began in 1844, Christ began the next phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, where He pleads “His blood before the Father in behalf of sinners.”²⁹ Christ’s ministry in the Most Holy Place signifies the beginning of the examination of the heavenly records of those who claim to be followers of Christ. When they are “accounted worthy,” the atoning blood of Christ is applied, their sins are blotted out from the book of life, and they shall share the kingdom of God.³⁰

Thus, according to Ellen G. White, the work of the investigative judgment consists of the examination of the life records of only those who claim to believe in Christ. The judgment of the wicked is “a distinct and separate work, and takes place at a later period.”³¹ True followers of Christ, however, whose lives show genuine repentance, have nothing to fear in judgment because they have Christ as their advocate, pleading their cases with His blood before God.³²

During the twentieth century, the doctrine of the investigative judgment was further refined in publications such as *Questions on Doctrine* and the Daniel and Revelation Committee and Biblical Research Institute Committee Series.

Questions on Doctrine

The book *Questions on Doctrine*³³ was the result of Adventist-evangelical discussions conducted in the 1950s. This volume represents the work of several Adventist scholars who desired to present the evangelical world with a clear exposition of Seventh-day Adventist teachings.³⁴ The authors went to extensive lengths to explain some of the more controversial doctrines of Seventh-day

28. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 429.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, 428, 482.

31. *Ibid.*, 480. She finds support for this view in 1 Pet 4:17, where the apostle asserts that the judgment is to begin “with the family of God.” She also finds support for the investigative judgment in Jesus’ parable of marriage in Matt 22. *Ibid.*, 428.

32. *Ibid.*, 482.

33. Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors, *Seventh-day Adventist Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1957).

34. *Ibid.*, 7.

Adventism, including the investigative judgment, and to present them in a positive light.

Questions on Doctrine represents a nuanced shift in Adventist thinking in regards to the atonement. In contrast to Smith's teachings,³⁵ Christ's sacrifice on the cross is understood as providing complete atonement for sin, available to the entire human race.³⁶ But His work, accomplished on Calvary, also involves "the application of the atoning sacrifice of Christ to the seeking soul. This is provided for in the priestly ministry of our blessed Lord, our great High Priest in the sanctuary above."³⁷ It is made clear, however, that Christ's atoning work on the cross can only benefit human beings as they surrender their lives to Him and experience new birth.³⁸

How does this understanding of the atonement affect the investigative judgment doctrine? While it is true that humanity is saved by grace alone, this grace must be manifested in a visible way in the life of a Christian,³⁹ since "it seems . . . abundantly clear that the acceptance of Christ at conversion does not seal a person's destiny."⁴⁰ God, through the work of the investigation of the records, determines "who are truly His Children."⁴¹ The authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, however, make it clear that God, being omniscient, does not need the investigative judgment. The proceedings of this judgment benefit the inhabitants of the universe, to whom God's love, justice, and mercy are vindicated.⁴²

Thus, while the doctrine of the investigative judgment has a slightly adjusted emphasis in *Questions on Doctrine* as compared to earlier Adventist writings, it nonetheless still represents a process of

35. The authors are clearly apologetic when they acknowledge that, in the past, some authors "expressed themselves as indicating that the atonement was not made on the cross of Calvary, but was made rather by Christ after He entered upon His priestly ministry in heaven". *Ibid.*, 348.

36. In this, the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* followed Ellen G. White's lead when she wrote in *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 29, "Christ's sacrifice in behalf of man was full and complete. The condition of the atonement had been fulfilled. The work for which He had come to this world had been accomplished."

37. Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors, *Questions on Doctrine*, 347.

38. *Ibid.*, 350.

39. *Ibid.*, 417.

40. *Ibid.*, 420.

41. *Ibid.*, 422.

42. *Ibid.*, 421.

examination of the lives of professed followers of Christ, in order to determine the sincerity of their profession of faith.

Daniel and Revelation Committee and Biblical Research Institute Committee

The volumes produced by the Biblical Research Institute and the Daniel and Revelation Committee⁴³ signify the most recent official Adventist attempt to address the issues surrounding the doctrine of the investigative judgment. Following the lead of *Questions on Doctrine*, the authors of these volumes seem to accept that complete atonement was made on the cross.⁴⁴ This, however, does not do away with the need for the investigative judgment. As Arnold V. Wallenkampf explains, the need for the investigative judgment does not lie in the fact that God's forgiveness is provisional and believers need to be definitively cleared of guilt. Instead, it finds its explanation in the fact that there is a difference between actual sin and the record of sin. Wallenkampf thus concludes,

The Scriptures do teach that sins can be forgiven although the record of sin remains. The record of sin is not destroyed at the time sin is forgiven. Ezekiel apparently has this in mind when he says: "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered."⁴⁵

Thus, while the sin is forgiven, the record remains. And in the case of the relapsed sinner, the guilt is returned to him in full.

43. The Daniel and Revelation Committee Series consists of 7 volumes published between 1986 and 1992 by the Biblical Research Institute, and edited by Frank B. Holbrook.

44. Arnold V. Wallenkampf, "Challengers to the Doctrine of the Sanctuary," in *Doctrine of the Sanctuary*, 201n17, states, "Today Seventh-day Adventists do teach that complete sacrificial atonement was made at the cross. . . . Uriah Smith emphatically stated their consensus in his book *Looking Unto Jesus* when he wrote that 'Christ did not make the atonement when He shed His blood upon the cross. Let this fact be fixed forever in the mind.' ([Battle Creek, 1898], p. 237). J. H. Waggoner expresses the same view when he wrote that 'there is a clear distinction between the death of Christ and the atonement' (*The Atonement* [Battle Creek, MI, 1872], p. 110)."

45. Wallenkampf, "A Brief Review," 598.

According to Wallenkampf, the process of the investigative judgment does not, however, determine a person's destiny; rather, it serves as a verification or confirmation of liquidated debts.⁴⁶ While the role of the judgment is to vindicate the saints, "the pre-advent heavenly audit will mean condemnation to such who once were in Christ Jesus but chose not to remain in the faith relationship."⁴⁷ There is a need, therefore, to review the lives of the people of God, and to vindicate those who are true followers of God. In this way, the investigative judgment will also "vindicate and forever establish both God's justice and mercy" before the entire universe.⁴⁸

This brief review shows that while the doctrine of the investigative judgment was refined over time, a common thread remained—namely, that just prior to the second coming of Christ, a review of the lives of God's people is necessary. It is this point—the review of the lives of believers—that became a bone of contention for Ballenger. Such a review, he argues, is unbiblical and anti-gospel.

To understand the depth of Ballenger's opposition toward the investigative judgment doctrine, we must examine his understanding of the fall, the atonement, and the role of personal choice in the process of salvation.⁴⁹

Sin and Atonement in the Writings of Ballenger

Sin and Its Results

God created Adam as a perfect being who was free to choose to follow God or to reject Him. Confronted by Satan, Adam made a conscious decision to disobey God's law. This decision had immediate consequences. By his disobedience, Adam became alienated from God, and thus subject to death. As a result of his sin, Adam, in whom all humanity was present, gave rise to a race of sinners, who inherited his sinful tendencies and continued to be alienated from God.⁵⁰ This alienation meant that, from that point on, human beings were not

46. *Ibid.*, 597.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 598–599.

49. It must be remembered, however, that Ballenger's writings constitute a response to Adventist teachings on the sanctuary and the atonement as outlined in the writings of Smith.

50. A. F. Ballenger, "Not Under the Law but Under the Grace," *Gathering Call*, February 1917, 2.

capable of choosing righteousness and life for themselves. But while the whole of humankind was present in Adam, and while a sinful nature was passed on through the laws of heredity, Adam's posterity was not responsible for sin. Ballenger thus writes,

The children of Adam did not make themselves sinners. I did not make myself a sinner. Adam made me a sinner, and I have sinned because I was born a sinner. My sins did not make me a sinner. Crab-apples on a crab-apple tree do not make the tree a crab-apple. . . . It bore crab-apples because it was a crab-apple tree. So your sins did not make you a sinner, but you sinned because you were born [a] sinner.⁵¹

Your sinning did not make you a sinner. Reader, you sinned because you were born a sinner. . . . We were sinners before we sinned. We were sinners because we were born of sinful seed, because we sprang from the root of Adam.⁵²

These statements indicate that Ballenger embraces a broad view of sin. Accordingly, sin is not limited to just disobedience, but extended to the state into which humans are born. While such a position per se is not biblically incorrect,⁵³ Ballenger uses it as a platform to develop a novel understanding of the atonement, intended to sound a death knell to the doctrine of the investigative judgment.

The Atonement

The fall of Adam was the point where God, who loved the world and saw the hopelessness of humanity, decided to intervene and offer the world the gift of righteousness and life, which was "as free to the human race as Adam's gift of carnality and death had been."⁵⁴ Thus, according to Ballenger, at the moment of Adam's fall, in order to rescue the human race from death, God appointed Jesus Christ as the

51. A. F. Ballenger, *The Proclamation of Liberty and the Unpardonable Sin* (Riverside, CA: self-pub., 1915), 57.

52. *Ibid.*, 158.

53. For an in-depth discussion on sin and its nature, see Martin F. Hanna, Darius W. Jankiewicz, and John W. Reeve, eds., *Salvation: Contours of Adventist Soteriology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018), 91–171.

54. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 38.

sin-bearer, who was to suffer the penalty for sin and, through His death, reconcile the world to Himself.

Through His death, Christ atoned for the sin of humanity, paid the penalty required by the law, and redeemed all humankind from the curse of the law.⁵⁵ The words of Christ on the cross—"It is finished!"—signified the completed, once-for-all atonement. The proof for this claim is found, according to Ballenger, in the fact that God raised His Son from the dead and set Him at His right hand, thus accepting His death as an atonement for the sins of those for whom He died, which included the whole world.⁵⁶ The immediate, subjective result of the death of Christ on the cross was that God reconciled all humanity to Himself.⁵⁷ Through this single act of Christ, God "had reached down and put his arms around the fallen world, and lifted it right back up to the place where it was before it fell off the platform of the garden of Eden."⁵⁸ In this way, through His death, Christ "created a new race of righteous men."⁵⁹

The essential element of this transaction, in Ballenger's theology, is that just as Adam's posterity had no choice regarding Adam's choice to disobey the law of God, in the same way all human beings are saved by Jesus Christ without their knowledge or consent. For Ballenger, the fact that unbelieving sinners do not feel or act saved does not change the fact that they are saved, "according to [God's] own purpose and grace which was given . . . in Christ Jesus before the world began."⁶⁰ Thus, in Ballenger's understanding, there is *no human involvement in the process of salvation*.

Personal Choice and the Unpardonable Sin

The fact that human beings are saved, however, does not necessarily mean that all people, with or without their consent, will go to heaven. For Ballenger, while the death of Christ places every human

55. A. F. Ballenger, "The Justice and Mercy of Substitution: To What was the Substitution Price Paid?" *Gathering Call*, January 1919, 3.

56. A. F. Ballenger, "Universal Atonement and the Catholic Doctrine of Indulgences," *Gathering Call*, June 1916, 2.

57. A. F. Ballenger, "Notes by the Way," *Gathering Call*, June 1916, 4.

58. A. F. Ballenger, "The Nine Theses," 1905, Document File 178, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University. See also A. F. Ballenger, "Notes by the Way," *Gathering Call*, April 1914, 8.

59. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 132.

60. *Ibid.*, 34.

being “back on the pier of life, and innocency before the law,” it only assures that, in God’s eyes, humanity stands “where they stood in Adam before Adam pushed them off into sin and death.”⁶¹ As a result, every person is faced with the same choice Adam had. In other words, it is up to the individual whether they choose to go “higher into eternal life or lower into the second death.”⁶² Ballenger writes, “Individual salvation depends upon individual appropriation by faith of that universal atonement, and on the additional acceptance of the life of Christ to be the life of the individual to save him from continuing in sin.”⁶³ According to Ballenger, the reason why all human beings are placed in the position where they have to make this choice is to transfer the responsibility for personal salvation from God to the individual. This is necessary so that no human or heavenly being can blame God for the eventual annihilation of those who refused the offer of salvation extended to them.⁶⁴

On this basis, Ballenger developed the idea that there are two types of salvation: “There is a general or ‘common salvation’ which includes all men, and there is a special salvation for those who believe. The general salvation will avail nothing to the man who refuses to believe. Why not believe the general salvation and thereby experience [*sic*] the special salvation?” Thus, while it seems that the “general salvation” was provided on the cross, “the special salvation” depends on human choice.⁶⁵

The essential part of Ballenger’s understanding of the atonement and human salvation is that, in his theology, a choice to reject salvation constitutes the unpardonable sin—that is, sin for which there is no atonement.⁶⁶ Christ’s death on the cross atoned for all sin that was the result of humans’ sinful nature, as well as of ignorance; however, His death did not atone for the sin of rejecting God’s grace. If it had, it would be impossible, according to Ballenger, to “make an end of sin,” which was part of Christ’s mission. Ballenger notes that

61. A. F. Ballenger, “The Triumph of the Truth,” *Gathering Call*, January 1916, 5.

62. *Ibid.*

63. A. F. Ballenger, “Notes by the Way,” *Gathering Call*, October 1917, 5; A. F. Ballenger, “How and When Were Sins Transferred to Christ,” *Gathering Call*, December 1918, 2.

64. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 136.

65. A. F. Ballenger, “Why Salvation is Free?” *Gathering Call*, May 1919, 1.

66. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 116.

if such sinning were included in the sacrifice of Christ, wicked men and angels could take advantage of this fact to continue their deliberate, defiant campaign against God and His people throughout all eternity. No, there is no sacrifice for such sinning, nor could there be without making Christ the perpetuator of sin.⁶⁷

Having paid the price, Christ waits for humanity to make the choice to accept the gift of grace extended to them.⁶⁸ But does this mean there is no place for Christian living or good works in Ballenger's teachings? On the contrary, Christ's death on the cross provides humanity with two free gifts. When human beings accept the gift of salvation, they are immediately forgiven for the sin they committed and will commit in ignorance, and also for sin that is the result of their sinful human nature.⁶⁹ But as they grow in Christ, He endows them with "another gift of His grace"—the ability to overcome their sinful nature, to stop sinning and to replace sin with "good works."⁷⁰ But, as Ballenger notes, these "good works are the fruits of salvation, not the foundation. As the foundation of salvation, God regards them as filthy rags. As the fruit of salvation they are a glory to God."⁷¹ If this visible change does not happen, however, this indicates that the individual failed to "fulfill the righteousness of the law in his life," and thus had committed the unpardonable sin.⁷² When human beings make this choice, they endorse those sins that were committed as a result of their carnal nature, thereby reenacting them "in mind and heart," and incurring their guilt.⁷³ As a result, the benefits of the atonement are removed from them and they are condemned to eternal damnation.⁷⁴

Ballenger's Rejection of the Investigative Judgment

The above overview of Ballenger's soteriology helps us understand why he felt so uncomfortable with the doctrine of the investigative judgment and why he ultimately rejected it. His first and foremost

67. *Ibid.*, 118.

68. Ballenger, "How and When," 2.

69. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 173.

70. Ballenger, "Why Salvation is Free?" 2.

71. *Ibid.*

72. A. F. Ballenger, "Last Day Lawlessness," *Gathering Call*, September 1920, 1.

73. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 196.

74. *Ibid.*

concern regarding the Adventist understanding of the investigative judgment was that it suggested salvation to be “dependent on what man ha[d] done for God instead of what God ha[d] done for man,”⁷⁵ a point often repeated in evangelical criticisms of the doctrine: through His atonement, God saved the entire human race; there is nothing to review. For Ballenger, the suggestion that salvation depends, in some way, upon human action, signifies a return to biblical pharisaism, and thus to the destruction of the essence of the gospel.⁷⁶ In his understanding of the atonement, Ballenger is clearly in polemical disagreement with Smith, who believes that the benefits of the atonement are granted to those whose lives show their allegiance to God. Smith’s view, Ballenger argues, makes the offering “individual and dependent upon an investigative judgment, instead of general, ‘once offered’ on behalf of all.”⁷⁷

Second, Ballenger claims that a review of the lives of believers and a final appropriation of Christ’s sacrifice just before His second coming suggests that His sacrifice for sin was incomplete, imperfect, and conditional.⁷⁸ As such, it has to be continued and completed through the lives of millions of Christians throughout the centuries, from the cross to the end of the world.⁷⁹ This, according to Ballenger, is clearly against the teachings of the NT, such as Heb 10:10–14, 17–18.⁸⁰ He argues,

Was the sacrifice of Christ complete? Or was it partial and incomplete and must be completed by the sacrifices of men? Are the sacrificing lives of all Christian men and women a necessary part of Christ’s sacrifice without which His sacrifice is incomplete? Was

75. Ballenger, “Notes by the Way,” October 1917, 5. See also A. F. Ballenger, *An Examination of Forty Fatal Errors* (Riverside, CA: self-pub., 1907) 52–23.

76. Ballenger, “Notes by the Way,” April 1914, 6.

77. A. F. Ballenger, “Notes by the Way,” *Gathering Call*, August 1917, 6.

78. A. F. Ballenger, “Was Paul Crucified for You,” *Gathering Call*, May 1917, 2.

79. *Ibid.*

80. “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb 10:10–14, NIV). “Then he adds: ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.’ And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary” (Heb 10:17–18, NIV).

the sacrifice of Christ so lacking that it has required the lives of all Christian men and women of the past, and will require the lives of all Christians of the future to complete that sacrifice? . . . Most of our readers will wonder why such questions are asked. The reason lies in the fact that there is a persistent effort being put forth to persuade the cast-out companies that Christ's sacrifice for sin was incomplete, and that during all the centuries Christ has been working through men to complete that sacrifice, and will continue to work to complete it until the end of time.⁸¹

Third, Ballenger believes that the investigative judgment—that is, a review of human choices—invokes fear and thus adversely impacts Christian assurance, as the sinner faces the investigative judgment unsure of His status before God.⁸² In contrast, Ballenger believes that the completed work of Christ on the cross ensures salvation the moment a sinner believes, providing full assurance that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient.⁸³

Fourth, Ballenger declares that the investigative judgment doctrine has no support in Scripture. In his opinion, the first angel's message, one of the passages in which Adventists find support for the investigative judgment, is the announcement of the "judgment of God in general"—that is, on the persecutors of His people—rather than a pronouncement of the investigative judgment.⁸⁴ Thus,

81. Ballenger, "Was Paul Crucified for You," 2.

82. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 127. A. F. Ballenger, *The First Angel's Message or the Investigative Judgment*, pamphlet, n. d., Ballenger's Collection, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, 36, writes, "The gospel is the good news of salvation from sin thru [sic] faith in the redeeming merits of Christ. Everyone who knows and accepts the gospel has the assurance that he is 'accepted in the Beloved:' he knows that he has salvation. How can one enjoy the good news so long as he must wait till God examines the books to see whether he is worthy of salvation? If God does not know who are to be saved till He examines the book, then certainly none of His children can know it till after the IJ [sic] makes its reports." Since this pamphlet is not dated, there is no certainty that it was written or endorsed by A. F. Ballenger. Although the Adventist Heritage Center estimates its publishing date to the late teens of this century, it could have been published after his death (1921), when the *Gathering Call* was under the editorship of his brother, E. S. Ballenger. Although the ideas contained in this pamphlet are congruent with the overall thrust of Ballenger's teachings, the information presented there will be used sparingly throughout this paper.

83. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 173.

84. A. F. Ballenger, "Notes by the Way," *Gathering Call*, November 1915, 8. See also A. F. Ballenger, "Before Armageddon," *Gathering Call*, May 1916, 1.

Ballenger states,

Notice that the souls under the altar are not begging the Lord to start an investigation to see whether an atonement should be made at the mercy-seat to silence the claims of a broken law for their death as transgressors of that law; but they are crying to God with a loud voice petitioning Him to “judge.” . . . By this time the reader must be deeply impressed with the truth that the announcement that the hour of God’s judgment is come, is indeed “eternal good tidings,” and it is good tidings because it announces the destructive judgments of God upon the persecutors of His saints and their eternal deliverance thereby.⁸⁵

A detailed study of certain portions of the book of Revelation convinced Ballenger that this judgment—which is declarative rather than investigative in nature—is still in the future.⁸⁶ Thus, he finds no Scriptural support for the claim that God needed to review the lives of His people or that the process began in 1844.⁸⁷ Finding no scriptural foundation for the investigative judgment doctrine, Ballenger declares it the product of human imagination. He suggests it found its way into Adventist theology in order to explain the delay of Christ’s coming after the disappointment of 1844. As time dragged on and Christ failed to appear, Adventists invented the theory that, before Christ could return, He must first investigate the records of sinners’ lives, in order to determine who was worthy of redemption.⁸⁸

In summary, Ballenger’s theology of atonement is a reaction to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of atonement at that time, and particularly to the writings of Smith. In his attempt to redefine the doctrine of the atonement, Ballenger rejects the investigative judgment doctrine, which, according to him, undermines the essence of the gospel by introducing a human element into the doctrine of the atonement. He argues that the official Adventist soteriology of his

85. A. F. Ballenger, *Before Armageddon* (Riverside, CA: self-pub., 1918), 120–121.

86. *Ibid.*, 122–123.

87. Curiously, Ballenger does not do away with 1844. For him, the date signifies the cleansing of the sanctuary from the sin that had not been atoned for by Christ’s death, including the sin of Satan and the sin of those who choose to reject God’s grace. See A. F. Ballenger, *Cast Out for the Cross of Christ* (Tropico, CA: Private Press, 1909), 76. See also Ballenger, “Notes by the Way,” April 1914, 6.

88. A. F. Ballenger, “The Atonement,” *Gathering Call*, October 1916, 3.

time makes the atonement dependent upon human beings rather than on the atoning death of Christ on the cross, which in turn resulted in a lack of Christian assurance.

Thus, Ballenger outlines a revised soteriology, where humans are saved on the basis of a completed atonement provided by Jesus Christ on the cross, without any human consent or cooperation. Thus, no review of human life is necessary, as humans' only role is to accept what Christ accomplished for them. Despite later Adventist attempts to fine-tune the doctrine, particularly in *Questions on Doctrine* and the work of the Biblical Research Institute, Ballenger would most certainly have continued to oppose the investigative judgment doctrine, as all further refinements continued to involve *a review of believers' lives*.

A Failed Quest: Indomitability of the Doctrine of the Investigative Judgment

Accordingly, it is to be expected that Ballenger, a harsh critic of Adventist teachings, would distance himself from the investigative judgment doctrine, as well as the language associated with it. Thus, one can search in vain for any reference to the investigative judgment or language associated with it in his soteriology. Despite his best efforts, however, Ballenger was unable to expunge it from his theology conceptually. While it may not seem so to the unprepared reader, the concept of a review is still intrinsically present in his theology.

The clearest evidence of the concept of a review of God's people is found in Ballenger's parable "Not Under Law but Under Grace."⁸⁹ For Ballenger, this parable demonstrates a true biblical understanding of the atonement. In the parable, the Governor General of a British colony, a man of great wealth and benevolence, is about to show his mercy and grant pardon to a criminal who has been sentenced to death. The Governor decides to redeem this criminal's life and adopt him as a son, even though it would cost him his entire fortune. The judge, "a man of irreproachable character"⁹⁰ who is a friend of the Governor's and who has just sentenced the criminal,

89. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 50–55, 144–148. Ballenger also printed this parable in several articles in *Gathering Call*, and eventually published it through the International Tract Society as *Not Under Law but Under Grace* (London: International Tract Society, n. d.).

90. Ballenger, *Proclamation of Liberty*, 50.

objects to the Governor's decision. The Governor argues that, because of his surroundings, the criminal did not have the opportunity to choose another type of life, stating, "It is my purpose to instruct him in a better life and lead him to forsake his lawless career."⁹¹

The judge objects because he believes the criminal will be on the streets committing crimes as soon as he is released. He argues, "It will be useless to pay the price of his life now, for the simple reason that the crimes he will commit will bring him back under the law almost immediately."⁹² The Governor admits this is a possibility, but his counterargument is that he is placing his entire fortune to pay not just for the criminal's past crimes, but also for his future ones, which he assumes the criminal will commit "in his ignorance and weakness."⁹³ This action, he claims, does not make the law void, but rather "establishes" it.⁹⁴ With this deposit of grace, the criminal will never come under the law again.

Furthermore, the Governor believes his efforts will reform the criminal and he will become a law-abiding citizen. "But in order to accomplish this, he must be delivered from the law, and kept free," otherwise the death sentence, demanded by the law, will have to be enforced.⁹⁵ The judge throws out one more objection: what if the criminal, who will certainly accept the Governor's grace, takes advantage of his newfound freedom from the law and continues to commit his crimes? Should he be allowed to continue his lifestyle without any repercussions? The Governor's response to this question is intriguing because it reveals the conditionality of forgiveness, thus necessitating a review of the criminal's life:

If he transgresses the law willfully after he has come to the knowledge of the truth . . . there will remain no part of my sacrificing deposit for him. . . . If he tramples upon my sacrifice for him; if he comes to count the giving of my fortune as something given that he may continue in law-breaking; if he thus deliberately does despite to the spirit of grace shown him, then there remains no deposit of grace for him. Then he must fall into the hands of the civil authority, and

91. *Ibid.*, 51.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, 52.

94. *Ibid.*, 54.

95. *Ibid.*

will be deserving of sorer punishment than if he had never known of my abounding grace.⁹⁶

These statements clearly reveal two phases of judgment: the *if* and the *then* phase. First, the sinner's life must be examined to determine *if* his/her life is congruent with the grace given to him/her. Once this process is completed, *then* the sentence will be pronounced. Thus, even though grace is given to all humanity and all humanity is saved from the penalty of the law, the life of the sinner after his/her conversion plays a definite role, as an indicator of his/her sincerity.⁹⁷ Accordingly, it appears that God must review the lives of those who claim to be Christians, in order to determine the validity of their claims to salvation.⁹⁸

This process of *if* and *then* appears to find support in Ballenger's other writings, where he suggests that *if* believers continue to abuse God's grace, *then* Christ's sacrifice becomes ineffective. In one article he states, "If God's deposit of grace on behalf of the transgressor of His law does no more than perpetuate the lawless life of the transgressor, it will have been made in vain . . . it will have served to reveal the mercy and love of God . . . but it will have been spent in vain so far as the sinner is concerned."⁹⁹ Elsewhere, Ballenger writes that if the sinner refuses to "afflict his soul" through repentance, "receive the atonement," and show that his life is in agreement with God's law, he will be "cut off," the benefits of the atonement will be removed, and the sinner will continue to live in a state of total separation from Christ.¹⁰⁰ A legitimate question at this point is: What process does God use to determine if His "deposit of grace" has been spent "in vain?" How does He know whether the person who professes to accept His grace is to be redeemed or "cut off"?

96. *Ibid.*, 55. Emphasis supplied. Emphasis in original omitted.

97. A. F. Ballenger's brother E. S. Ballenger, "Why Salvation is Free?" *Gathering Call*, March 1930, 1, agrees with this conclusion: "Then are there no good works connected with salvation? Yes, plenty of them. And if good works do not appear, man's claim to salvation is a fraud." E. S. Ballenger's theology is virtually the same as that of his brother in this regard.

98. A. F. Ballenger, *Forty Fatal Errors*, 104.

99. A. F. Ballenger, "Not Under Law but Under Grace," *Gathering Call*, February 1917, 2.

100. Ballenger, "Notes by the Way," April 1914, 7.

By Way of Conclusion

Ballenger does not provide his readers with answers to these questions, but his soteriology—according to which “it is possible for man, by rejecting grace, to commit sins for which Christ did not substitute, whose penalty Christ did not pay in His death, and which can only be paid in the death of the sinner himself”¹⁰¹—appears to require *a review of believers’ lives*. Although investigative judgment terminology is absent from Ballenger’s writings, it manifests itself through his *if* and *then* terminology. Through their life choices—the “human element” so reviled by Ballenger—human beings either accept the provisions of the atonement or reject them.

This raises an important question: How could a critic of the investigative judgment doctrine, particularly the concept of *a review of believers’ lives*, ultimately make it part of his theology? What inclined him to retain the element of Adventist doctrine he was so vehemently opposed to? The second part of this study will offer a broader understanding of Protestant soteriology that can aid in answering this question.

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101. A. F. Ballenger, “Extracts from a Letter,” *Gathering Call*, October 1914, 5.