

What is an Advent Christian?

By David Burge

99.9% of Advent Christian beliefs are those we hold in common with Christians of all denominations, across all ages. We believe that salvation comes only by accepting Christ as our Sin bearer, Saviour, and Sovereign. Yet some of the things that Advent Christians believe do set us apart. We don't say these things make us "more Christian" than any other Believers. But we do see these issues as important enough for us to take a stand on them.



The Issues

Years ago a number of Christian groups chose the term "Advent" as part of their name to express their belief in certain Scriptural truths. Many Christian creeds, confessions of faith, theories and traditions were in conflict with the Bible. It was (and still is) widely taught: that the prophecies of the Second Coming of Christ are fulfilled "spiritually" in the history of the church, that there will be a "golden age" of peace lasting at least 1000 years before the resurrection and judgment; that the dead go immediately to heaven or hell and are now enjoying or suffering their reward; and that heaven is the final abode of all the saints.

These ideas were found to be without Scriptural foundation. Out of a desire to proclaim the truths of Scripture the Advent Christian movement was born.

Looking for His Coming

The hope of Christians is that Jesus will come again. But if at least 1000 years of universal peace is to be enjoyed before the resurrection and judgment, in what sense can we watch; or wait with bated breath, looking for his Coming? It is true that a probable year for Christ's return was fixed upon by many early Adventists. This was wrong. Many repented. But it was not their choice of a year for the end that has been of enduring significance.

What has endured is their witness to the truths of Christ's personal coming to judge the living and the dead, and to establish his reign upon a renewed earth, and that this coming is imminent, not necessarily separated from us by a thousand or more years.

Most Christians today look for a literal, physical coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. Many believe this coming may be soon. Advent Christians played a big part in rescuing this truth from obscurity.



Only God is Immortal

Many people believe human beings have an immortal soul: That John Brown's body lies a-moulding in the grave, but his soul goes marching on.

- **The Bible says God alone is immortal.**
- **The Bible says human beings are "dust and ashes".**

To be immortal is to be death-proof. We are not death-proof. We die. Body and soul. Lock, stock and barrel. There is nothing left to go marching on with. When God made Adam, he made a body of dust. He breathed into him the breath of life and Adam became a living soul. A living soul is not an immortal one. At death the body returns to dust and the spirit, or the breath of life, returns to God who gave it. Without the breath of life the whole person is dead.

Life Only in Christ

We call our belief "life only in Christ" or "Conditional Immortality".

The Bible teaches that we do not go to heaven or hell at death. Immortality is something we must seek after and only the righteous will be given immortality by Jesus Christ at His Coming. Since it is only

by faith in Jesus Christ that people are granted immortality we may say that God has made immortality conditional upon faith in Christ. This is why we call this belief "life only in Christ" or "Conditional Immortality".

Death: Friend or Foe?

For the Greeks salvation was to escape the body altogether. For them death was something less than an unqualified disaster. Something to look forward to. Yet when Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was dead, he didn't mouth pious platitudes about his being "promoted to glory". Nor did he speak of Lazarus as having "gone to a better place". He wept!

Those who deny all possibility of a future life tell us that at death we simply sink into oblivion. Those who believe in the immortality of the soul often speak of death as a doorway to a better place.

The Bible however speaks of death as "the last enemy" to be defeated only when Christ comes again.

This World is Good—The Next is Better!

The idea that the soul is "spiritual" and the body isn't implies to many people that Creation itself is unspiritual, even distasteful. The Greeks spoke of the body as the prison house of the soul. They thought of this material creation as second rate.

The Bible, on the other hand, sees the body, and the material world in general, as good and glorious. How could it be otherwise? It was made by a good and glorious God? And the Bible affirms that, in spite of everything, God prizes his Creation enough to make a revised version of all things.

Hell is not a cosmic torture chamber. It is a Divine garbage dump. It is an incinerator in which all that is sinful or imperfect about this world - all who are in rebellion against God - will be finally destroyed when this world is made new. Then - whatever else "heaven" may include - believers will live forever with God and Christ in a whole new and improved universe in which only righteousness will dwell.

A Resurrection Hope

Many believe that it is only natural for every human being to go on living after death. But there is nothing about the way we are made that enables us to live on and on. All the earliest Christian creeds affirmed the belief that the future life comes only by means of the resurrection of the body.

Resurrection is a super-natural work of God. We go to our graves as dead as dead can be. We can only go on living beyond the grave if we are given our lives back again. This is just what God intends to do. He will give us back our lives, just as he gave life to us in the first place, at the resurrection. Our resurrection hope is not a blind leap of faith. Jesus has been there and done that! Because he lives we can know that we shall live also.



So... What?

These Advent Christian distinctives are God-honouring, and Christ-centred. Our God is not a cosmic torturer, worse even than Hitler or any human tyrant. There is nothing within us that will enable us to live beyond death. If there is any hope for the future it must be found in Christ alone!

Christ is much more than a spiritual referee, a mere sorter of souls, sending some "up" and some "down". He is the Resurrection and the Life. Upon him and his coming depend the resurrection, the reward of the righteous, the abolition of sin and its consequences, the renewal and perfection of the earth.

He is our only hope. He is all we need. He is all the world needs.



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