

the book of Ezra and draw sermons that are relevant and inspiring for personal commitment.

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*Lord, I Have a Question: Everything You Ever Wanted to Ask God But Were Afraid to Say Out Loud*, by Dan Smith. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2004.

When this book was published, Dan Smith was a senior pastor at the La Sierra University Church in California. His wife, Hilda, and his two sons, Alex and Eric, have accompanied him in his service on mission trips around the world. While working as a missionary and pastor, he became aware of the need of his church members who kept asking questions about God in quietness. The author introduces basic questions related to God, particularly on the issues about the cross, evil, suffering, and eschatology. He admits that his answers are not the last words (9-18). He gives some anchor points that are clear on the topic and strengthen his arguments.

Smith speaks about the divine nature and attributes of God, which, according to the biblical text, cannot be changed, negotiated, or questioned by man (19-28). Smith explains that the tree in the garden of Eden was a loving warning of the natural consequences, and the cross and the fire (at the second death) are the natural consequences of sin (29-43). Smith describes briefly some models of atonement: satisfaction model, moral influence model, victory model, and the revelatory substitution model. According to Smith, the last theory, revelatory substitution, is the closest to the criteria of atonement and has accommodated the other theories of atonement (44-66). He analyzes the meaning of grace, hell, and the unchanging God. Here, Smith also discusses the term predestination, which comes from the understanding that God is variable. Smith affirms that God is constant and sin does change man, but does not change God. Grace is for everyone, everywhere, and every time (67-75). The author strongly affirms that God's grace is not a 'cheap grace.' He states that man's salvation is never based on good works (76-89).

Smith shows that God speaks to human beings through all of Scripture. Every figure in the Old Testament and New Testament, although imperfect, speaks meaningfully to those who need to hear the good news about Christ. All stories and events have been used to describe and clarify the work of Christ to save human beings (90-104). Smith

connects the heavenly judgment with the prophecies that lead to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the year 1844. He talks about the judgment scenes when Christ moves from the holy to the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary. He pictures Christ as the Judge who is judging God's people and the wicked ones. The judgment of the living is determined by each individual. It does not include an arbitrary time set by God. The judgment is primarily about God and the issue is Christ. According to Smith, the judgment started from Christ's death until post-millennial judgment (105-126).

Next, Smith explores the issue of evil and suffering. He holds that God is love all the time and at the same time he is righteous in His acts and gives life. God is not the source of evil and suffering, but Satan is the source of all the bitter things in this life. God never uses force for humanity to choose Him. God allows suffering in a generic sense, not in a specific sense (127-141). About miracles and prayers, Smith describes those in chapter ten. Miracles do not happen all the time. But sometimes God uses unnatural means to teach humans to believe in His words. Miracles are the signs of what God wants to do for man spiritually. In other words, miracles for the sake of spiritual needs can happen every day, but the physical miracles will be repeated physically during the millennium. Prayer serves to change man; it does not change God. It builds man's relationship with God, and Christ is offering intercessory prayers in heaven for repentant sinners. Prayer is the way to receive God's wisdom in daily struggles of life (142-159).

In view of Smith's eschatological perspective, he believes that those who deny the cross deny Christ's mediatorial works and this will be the cause of their punishment, which is the second death. Further, Christ delays His coming in order to save people from the second death. The book of Revelation pictures the condition of the righteous and the wicked. This book reveals the wages of sin and the rewards of the obedience to God's law (160-196). Smith closes his book by challenging the reader to be faithful to God, like the 144,000 who follow the Lamb, and have no lie in their mouth (197-203).

Dan Smith tries to provide an answer to the question, "how can I understand God so I can enter the kingdom of heaven" or "how can I behave toward sufferings and remain a faithful Christian." Smith has provided many good arguments, however, there are some statements that need more clarification and explanation.

*First*, according to Smith, Christ did not need to come the first time in order to save man, if the people had followed the messages of the prophets (14). However, Christ came to this earth to "be with us." Christ came to live an obedient life, to be man's great example, and to be the redeemer of mankind.

*Second*, in Smith's "nonnegotiable anchor point" (chap. 2) he does not provide a balanced perspective of some points: (1) He discusses that God came to give life, not to take it away. He explores the loving act of God but does not give an explanation regarding human sufferings especially for those who believe in Christ. (2) Smith says, "we need not fear God" because perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). However, he does not explain the apostle Paul's statement, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (3) Smith claims that "God is good news" for true Christians because everything about God is good news. However, he fails to describe that God is bad news for Satan and his followers. Christ is not only the Lamb, but He is also the Lion who overcomes Satan. (4) Smith emphasizes that Christians are Christ's friends and "we are not in a master/servant relationship. We're friends." However, Christ also asked His disciples to be His *doulos* (servant) and he called our "Father" God.

*Third*, Smith says, "God the Father is exactly like the Son" (p. 27), however, how far the 'exactness' goes and in what sense, Smith does not explain.

*Fourth*, Smith introduces a "let him go" theology (30-33). He believes God just 'let him (man) go' when he/they used their power of choice. So, when Adam chose to sin, God just let Adam go to sin. According to Smith, sin has natural consequences, similar to smoking which leads to cancer. He does not clarify more on what the sense or the meaning of the consequences are. Did Christ come only to bear natural consequences? What is the significance of Christ's resurrection if He bore only natural consequences?

In summary, Smith's book is a practical understanding of God and answers some of the curiosity about God (His divine attributes) and man (suffering and salvation). The reviewer recommends this book for a non-specialist audience, although there need to be more explanations, and for the student of theology for the sake of comparison of understandings about God, Christ, man, and the nature of sin.

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*The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches*, by David T. Olson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

David T. Olson, director of the American Research Project and director of church planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church, presents