

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES, INC Proclamation!

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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

A testimony to God's grace:

Calvary's story

By J. Mark Martin
with Bryan K. Fergus

"You will be weeping every Friday night over sermons that you will not be able to preach." These were the words that the Conference President spoke to Mark and Leslie Martin in May of 1982 as they officially resigned from the Seventh-day Adventist ministry. Mark and Leslie,

"You will be weeping every Friday night over sermons that you will not be able to preach."

contribution to the cause of Christ. Beyond this, Calvary supports over 100 missionaries around the world, facilitates an extensive internet outreach program (www.calvaryphx.com), a city-wide 24-hour prayer network, prison ministries, and home Bible studies. It produces a national radio broadcast called "Grace Upon Grace" and has pioneered ministry to searching Seventh-day Adventists through sdaoutreach.org. Calvary's tape ministry distributes over 150,000 teaching tapes each year. Through CalvaryRadio.com, Calvary broadcasts its six weekly services and other Christian music and programming twenty-four hours a day to people worldwide.

In addition, life at Calvary is enhanced by HeBrews Coffee Shop and Calvary BookStore, one of the largest Christian bookstores in Phoenix. Strategically located on a campus that covers over one square city block, Calvary Community



newlyweds and graduates of Pacific Union College, left the office after this pronouncement feeling relieved yet uncertain about the future.

Convinced of their call to serve God, Mark and Leslie immediately went to the Lord in prayer, asking Him to simply give them opportunities to share the Gospel with the people of Phoenix, Arizona. Only God could have known that twenty years later they would be celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Calvary Community Church, a thriving and dynamic grace-filled community of believers in the metro Phoenix area.

Calvary Community Church currently consists of over 8,000 members as it makes a significant

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LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES (LAM), INC

Mission: To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

Motto: Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

Message: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

What does it mean to trust God?

We often speak of righteousness by faith and we should for it is the essence of the good news of the gospel. But what does faith really mean? Faith means both believing and trusting, but how does one know if he really has it? What do belief and trust look like in real life here and now? Like so many other aspects of Christianity mere definitions seem sterile, lifeless and monochromatic. Perhaps that is why Jesus used so many parables in His teachings.

As you read this issue of *Proclamation* I hope you will discover what it means to trust God, not only for righteousness and eternal life, but for everyday decisions and life direction. Like many of the Bible characters, most of us have had many failures in life's "faith class"—I surely have. Yet, many of us have at least passed some of the tests of faith. We usually give tests to measure knowledge, ability and skill but most of God's tests are given to measure faith. I find that God often has to give me the same test over and over again. He changes the setting and circumstances but the underlying dynamic is the same: "Do you really trust Me?"

It is easy for us to say we trust God, but the test comes when He asks us to do something that has the potential of taking away our assets, reputation, income, security and friends. That is the test. Are we actually willing to put Him first even if it means personal loss?

True to our conscience

Some of the letters we get make it sound like the pastors who leave Adventism (and other similar denominations) do so for jaded reasons—secret sin, not wanting to obey, not having a personal relationship with Jesus, etc. Doubtless there are some who have left for these reasons. However, from my knowledge and experience, this is not the norm. Rather, most of us who have left the Adventist ministry did so for no other reason than because we felt that in order to be true to our conscience we had to leave. Most of us left only after serious, in-depth Bible study, research and discussion with other pastors. We left because we felt that some of the doctrines were unbiblical and often contrary to the clear teachings of the New Testament.

When we "live by faith," step out, and follow God at personal risk, it is usually then that we see God's miraculous hand and experience His direct guidance. When Carolyn and I were placed in a position where we either had to promise to teach all 27 of the "Fundamentals" or resign, it was a very difficult choice. We had just built our "dream home" on five

acres in the outskirts of Watsonville. We had planted a large garden and had many fruit trees—something we had always wanted. Because we had rented all the years of our Adventist ministry to this point, we were excited to be homeowners—along with the bank. We had taken out two loans on our home and our payments were high. Because we both worked for the Central California Conference leaving meant that both of us would be unemployed. When we made the decision to follow our conscience and resign we felt we would probably lose our home. It was then we saw the hand of God for provision. The weekend we resigned, the church members took up an offering without our instigation and gave us \$7,000. We lived in that home for many years after that and never once missed a payment. Yet the most important miracle of God was the inner peace we had after we made our decision.

God always provides

I saw God's provision again yesterday. I had the assurance from one of our writers that he would have an article for *Proclamation*. I was counting on it and did not have a good back up. Then, I received word at the last minute that the article would not be forthcoming. I simply prayed, telling God the situation, depending upon His guidance. When I opened my email, there were two unexpected articles! One from Greg Taylor and one from Steve Kurtright! Both were excellent and on the same underlying theme of faith. They both illustrate what it means to trust God and the personal risk and potential loss involved. They also show that God is faithful to those who follow the Word of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Yes, before I even asked, God impressed others to supply the need!

Often God takes us through very difficult places to test our faith. It was true in Bible times; it is true today. I encourage you to read these articles and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you to new levels of trust even if it means taking risks for God.

Thank You! There are still only a very small percentage of the readers of *Proclamation* who are supporting this ministry. Yet, by God's grace through those who do support this ministry, we have been able to keep it going. As I write this we are about four thousand dollars short of meeting the cost of this issue. If you get this issue, it is evidence that God, through many of you, again supplied the need. Would you join us in prayer that we will follow exactly where God leads? If we do that, we trust that He will supply the need. Thank you. **!**

Proclamation!

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Richard Goyne, MA, STM

From the New Testament Record Saturday or Sunday?

In reading letters of those Adventists who are struggling with the resolution and orientation of their faith, one cannot but note that the problem of Sabbath observance is a major difficulty to many. This is especially perplexing to those that have been taught by Adventist leaders that the Roman Catholic Church changed the day of worship from the seventh day Sabbath to the pagan day Sunday.

The Catholic catechism is quoted by Adventists as proof that the Catholic Church changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. But proof of a doctrine from a Catholic catechism is poor proof indeed. For the same catechism states that the Catholic Church is the one true church! We should turn to the Bible and not to catechisms for our understanding.

On his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul went first to synagogues in the Greek speaking cities and preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Some of the Jews and numbers of the Gentile proselytes would soon be forced to form a separate Christian congregation because of the hostility of those Jews who rejected Paul's teaching (Acts 13:3-5).

One such congregation existed at Troas, which Paul visited on his second missionary journey. Although Paul was there for seven days, there is no mention of his attending a worship service on the Sabbath. Instead, the Scriptures tell us "on the first day of the week we came together to break bread" (Acts 20:6).

We note in this text that the Christians at Troas met on the first day of the week for a specific purpose. They met to break bread; that is, to celebrate communion, and that Paul's preaching was part of that service. Nowhere in the text is there any indica-

tion that this worship service was simply an extension of a Sabbath service, as Adventist apologists so fondly claim.

We know from the Bible that there were Jewish Christians who continued to observe all of the rites of the Mosaic tradition, including circumcision, Passover and the Sabbath. Some of them tried to enforce their rituals upon Paul's Gentile converts (Acts 15:1).

Paul resisted such Judaizers and the matter was referred to the elders at Jerusalem. That august body decided that the Gentile converts to Christ were not required to observe any of the Jewish laws, with the exception of certain dietary requirements that would enable Jews and Gentiles to share a common meal, and the restriction of illicit sexual conduct (Acts 15:23-29).

Not a system of laws

Paul's doctrinal position was that the Christian's allegiance is not to a system of laws but to a person — Christ (Gal. 3:11-14). And he left it to the individual what worship practices to follow. "One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). To the Colossians he was even more specific, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you with regard to a Sabbath day" (Col. 2:16). Adventist apologists tell us that this text refers, not to the seventh day, but to ceremonial Sabbaths. But the word for Sabbath (Greek sabbaton) occurs seventy times in the New Testament and in sixty-nine of those, the context plainly means the seventh day Sabbath. Why not here?

Then there is the statement of the apostle John

Richard Goyne is a 92 year young Bible student. He comes from an Adventist family and served as a local elder in the SDA church for many years. After reading Dr. Ronald Numbers book on Ellen White, he started studying. This led him to discover the inconsistencies and contradictions in Adventism, which, in turn, motivated him to do advanced theological study. Mr. Goyne holds a Masters degree in Theology and also a Masters Degree in Sacred Theology.

...not one of the New Testament letters of the apostles, which contain all kind of admonitions on Christian behavior, has a single word on Sabbath observance.

that “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit” (Rev. 1:10). Here John introduces a new term, because the term ‘Lord’s Day’ does not appear elsewhere in the Bible. John did not identify which day of the week he meant, but we find the expression ‘Lord’s Day’ used by the earliest Christian authors in their writings where the term is plainly identified as the first day of the week.

Just after Revelation penned

Ignatius, bishop of the church at Antioch where the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26), made the meaning of the term ‘Lord’s Day’ very clear. Writing shortly after John penned the Revelation and while on his way to a martyr’s death at Rome, he wrote “... no longer observing Sabbaths but fashioning your lives after the Lord’s Day on which our lives also arose with him through his death!”¹

Justin Martyr, a widely traveled Christian writer, in the first half of the second century wrote, “On the day called Sunday there is a meeting of those who live in cities or the country.... We hold this common gathering on Sunday since it is the first day on which God, transforming darkness and matter, made the universe and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on that same day.”²

The practice of the Gentile Christians meeting on the first day of the week for worship is understandable. It was on that day that Christ arose from the dead. It was on that day his earliest appearances occurred. It was on the first day of the week that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church at the time of the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was fifty days after Passover, which in that year fell on Saturday, so that the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the Christian believers on the first day of the week.

And there is the absence in the New Testament letter of Paul, Peter, John and James of any admonition or instructions on the subject of Sabbath keeping. And these letters were written at a time when hundreds of Gentile converts were being added to the church. Many of these converts would have been completely ignorant of the subject of Sabbath observance; in fact they began and ended their day at midnight instead of at sundown. Such converts would have needed explicit instructions if they were to “keep the Sabbath day holy”.

Silence is eloquent

Yet not one of the New Testament letters of the apostles, which contain all kind of admonitions on Christian behavior, has a single word on Sabbath observance. Their silence on the subject is more eloquent than words. The more so in Paul’s case, for in his final farewell to the believers at Ephesus he said “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27). Nowhere does the Bible record that he every proclaimed Sabbath observance to them.

While Jewish Christians may have continued their customary Sabbath keeping, there is no Biblical evidence that Gentile Christian congregations practiced Sabbath observance. There is ample evidence, in addition to that cited here, that Gentile Christians were worshipping on the first day of the week, which they designated as the Lord’s Day because on that day their Lord rose from the dead—the most important event in the history of mankind, and surely a day that would be remembered. **!**

¹J.B. Lightfoot, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) p. 71.

²Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976) p. 287.

The right place at the right time— 25 years ago!

Campmeeting was finally over, and I was more discouraged than ever. The main speaker had dwelt on “The sins of God’s people.” Every sin seemed directed straight at me. What to do? I felt there was no possible way I could be good enough to get into heaven. Two weeks later it was time to take our boys the 200 miles back to Monterey Bay Academy. Our younger son and I arrived on Friday. On Sunday my husband would bring our other son over. That afternoon I learned that the new Bible teacher for

Pacific Union College from Australia would be speaking. My hostess said that he was a bit controversial. But Dale Ratzlaff, the MBA Bible teacher, had recognized Dr. Des Ford’s voice and made the announcement; so I felt the meeting would be “kosher.” I had no idea that meeting would be the most tremendous life-changing event of my life. As I look back over it, it was for me a “Paul on the Damascus Road” experience. Dr. Ford piled one text after another in rapid fire succession. Even John 3:16 took on new meaning coming from Dr. Ford. Text after text took my breath away. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in

your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Rom. 10:9 and “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 6:23. My salvation became real and personal at that initial meeting with Des. After 25 years I’m still shouting it from the housetops to anyone who will listen! The Holy Spirit has directed my life in a special way since then. Hallelujah! Just ask my husband. I’m a new Kathleen. He was so impressed he soon followed me with his whole heart into the Gospel.

—Kathleen Paulson, Irvine, California
(permission received to use name)

What is Former Adventist Fellowship and why does it exist?

Colleen and Richard Tinker

During the three-and-one-half years since Former Adventist Fellowship first existed, people have asked many questions about it: What is it? What is its purpose? Is it a meeting place for disgruntled Adventists?

First, Former Adventist Fellowship is *not* an organization. It is *not* a movement or an alternative church. It is *not* incorporated. The first Former Adventist Fellowship is a ministry of Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California. A group of former Adventists, some of whom were members of Trinity and some of whom were not, shared with us our vision for a weekly ministry to people who had left Adventism and had found Jesus to be their Sabbath rest. In addition, we saw the need of a ministry for people who had left Adventism but had not found Jesus or a place to worship. Trinity church graciously offered a venue for weekly Bible studies for such a group, and the senior pastor volunteered to be the pastoral overseer of the group.

Online for everyone

FormerAdventist.com is an online version of our local meeting, making Former Adventist Fellowship available to people around the world.

Not for Adventists

FAF, as we call it, is not an outreach to Adventists per se. It is specifically designed as a place for former Adventists to study the Bible, to exchange stories, and to support and pray for each other. It takes, on the average, about two years for a person who leaves Adventism to transition completely out and to function as a spiritually secure Christian in a healthy local church. (Two years is about the average time it takes a person to debrief from traditional cults as well.) FAF provides an environment for this transitioning to happen in safety and with prayer support.

“Disgruntled” Adventists do not find a comfortable place at FAF. While the members of both the weekly groups and the forum are usually former Adventists, they are not angry, hurt, or bitter at the church. In fact, people who have never been Adventists but who desire deep Bible study have joined both the local groups and the forum. FAF is not a place where people complain about Adventism. Members frequently discuss the differences they find in the Christian community and in the Bible since they have left Adventism, but they are not focussed on complaints. Rather, they focus on Bible study, healing, growing, and supporting each other as they grow in their freedom in Christ.

Truth accessible

At the same time FAF focuses on ministering to former Adventists, it does also serve a secondary function of helping to make the truth about Adventism accessible. The web site not only has a live forum, but it also publishes the stories of many who have left as well as the complete Bible studies and notes that the Redlands group uses on Friday evenings. Adventists who are searching or are curious about why “formers” left the church will find resources and links to other sites that will provide further information.

Former Adventist Fellowship is a place where, by the grace of God, Christ is central, the word of God is honored, and people searching for truth and healing will find the Holy Spirit ministering to them.

New groups forming

New local FAF groups have started in Kalamazoo, Michigan, at Calvary Chapel, and in Charlotte, North Carolina. Dale Ratzlaff will soon be starting an FAF group in Phoenix, Arizona. If you are interested in participating in or starting an FAF group or would like to join the forum discussion on www.formeradventist.com, please email us at FormerAdventist@aol.com.

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Are some foods unclean?

Christopher A. Lee

To the majority of Christians, the question asked in the title of this article no doubt seems like an irrelevant exercise in “weak and worthless elemental things.”¹ However, to thousands of believers who are in legalistic traditions, the issue of food has taken on a stature that determines one’s readiness for baptism, and is nearly considered a salvation issue by some.

I was born and raised as a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA). At age ten, I signed SDA baptismal vows stating that I would abstain “from unclean foods.”² This was not a hard vow for me to make at that time because my family adhered to the “health message” taught by SDA prophetess Ellen G. White. I had been so indoctrinated with this message that, although I had never tasted it, even the thought of meat nauseated me. Even when I started eating a little beef during a rebellious teenage phase, I found that I still had serious hang-ups about “unclean meats.”

I later resolved to improve my spiritual life and naturally believed that this must include a return to vegetarian diet. For me, the issues of diet, holiness, and even salvation were always intrinsically linked. After all, if one could not be baptized into Christ without abstaining from pork and could not be translated to Heaven without abstaining from all meat as I had been taught,³ how could it not be a salvation issue?

In my late twenties, I began to study the Bible in earnest. I was shaken to the core to discover that food is not a salvation issue or a holiness issue. In fact, the scripture seemed to be telling me that food was not an issue at all for new covenant Christians! But how does one raised in a works oriented tradition transition to a grace based mind set in regards to food?

The first step in returning the issue of food to the status it deserves is to gain a basic understanding of the differences between the covenant that Christians live under today and the covenant that the Israelites lived under during the Old Testament dispensation. A full study of the covenants is outside the scope of this article,⁴ but some valuable insights may be drawn from a book of the Bible written to Jewish Christians, the book of Hebrews.

Jewish believers were struggling with many issues related to prophetic rituals that had been fulfilled in Christ. The writer of Hebrews outlines many of the temple sacrificial rituals. Take special note of Hebrews chapter 9, verses 9 and 10.

Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. Heb 9:9b-10 (NASB)

It is clear that many of the ceremonial rites given to Israel centered on the ritualistic cleansing of the body and the avoidance of ceremonially unclean things including certain foods. But note that these rituals were only imposed for a time. Notice also that chapter 8 presents Christ as the fulfillment of the rituals that were part of the old covenant and the mediator of a new and better covenant, not like the old covenant.

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant With the

house of Israel and with the house of Judah; Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand To lead them out of the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care for them, says the Lord... When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. Heb 8:6-9, 13 (NASB)

Hebrews' author makes it clear that the old covenant and the rituals embodied in it had become obsolete and were ready to disappear, but early Jewish Christians debated how Gentile believers should be instructed in these matters. Some Jewish believers insisted that Gentiles should also become circumcised and submit to all the customs and rituals of the Mosaic Law, including the avoidance of "unclean foods."

To settle the matter, a council of church leaders was held in Jerusalem. James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, pronounced the definitive word on the issue as recorded in Acts chapter 15.

"Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood." For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." Acts 15:19-21, 28, 29 (NASB)

James does not attempt to burden the gentiles with laws related to clean and unclean foods, but since he knows there are Jews in every city who still teach and live under the Mosaic Law, James identifies the three practices that would be most offensive to these Jews. It is James' intent that gentile believers live in freedom, but that they also live in a way that will allow them to reach the Jews in their area with the Gospel message. James advocates a standard of love that would later be echoed by the apostle Paul.

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One, person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to

judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One, person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let

It is James' intent that gentile believers live in freedom, but that they also live in a way that will allow them to reach the Jews in their area with the Gospel message.

what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. Romans 14:1-6, 13-20 (NASB)

However, Paul was careful to warn that no person should act as another's judge based on things that were only in place to prophetically point to Christ.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Col 2:16-17 (NASB)

By the time Paul wrote his pastoral letters to Timothy he had evidently battled with enough Judaizers that he felt compelled

to warn Timothy, in no uncertain terms, that he should be wary of such false doctrines.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 1 Tim 4:1-6 (NASB)

It is also instructive for us to carefully study the vision the Lord gave Peter before sending him to Cornelius' house.

These bold statements apparently gave great offense to the Pharisees who were unwilling to hear the message of the new covenant Christ was ushering in.

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he *saw* the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Acts 10:9-15 (NASB)⁵

Some have pointed out that the focus of this vision was not on food, but was related to extending the gospel to the gentiles. This is true, but using that argument to summarily dismiss this passage begs a question. When did Christ ever use an untruth to

illustrate a truth? In all the parables and allegories He told during His ministry Christ always used a basic truth from everyday life to illustrate a larger spiritual truth.

It is inconceivable that Christ is really saying, "Peter, it's true that there is no longer any ceremonial difference between Jews and Gentiles. I have declared both Jew and Gentile clean. However, you should completely forget what I said earlier about there being no ceremonial differences between foods. I know I said I cleansed them and they are no longer unholy, but I didn't really mean that. The ceremonial distinctions between foods still stand. So the point I was making is true, but the way I illustrated My point was untrue."

If you cringed while reading these facetious words, keep in mind that this is essentially what those who dismiss this text are claiming the Lord meant. It does indeed seem blasphemous to suggest this was the Lord's intent. It is especially

inconceivable when compared to what Christ taught during His earthly ministry.

After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated,⁷ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man." Matt 15:10-11, 15-18 (NASB)

In case anyone is tempted to think Christ's instruction only applies to the ceremonial washing of hands, Mark provides a very clear parenthetical statement⁶ that should dispel any doubt as to the magnitude of Christ's declaration.

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."]

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) Mark 7:14-19 (NASB)

These bold statements apparently gave great offense to the Pharisees who were unwilling to hear the message of the new covenant Christ was ushering in. Matthew records Jesus' reply to the disciples when they pointed out the offense He had caused.

Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." Matt 15:12-14 (NASB)

Jesus calls these teachers of the law blind because they were unable to see the greater truths that the law foreshadowed. He warned that through their blindness they would lead others into the same pit.

Is it possible, after a careful review of scripture, that there are still some modern day Pharisees who are offended by the teachings of Christ? Are there still some that would attempt to legalistically rationalize away the clear and repeated teachings of the New Testament? Are there those who would judge others based on ceremonial matters? If there are, perhaps they should consider the protest of James White, an SDA pioneer, who found himself facing nineteenth century Judaizers.

Some of our good brethren have added "swine's flesh" to the catalogue of things forbidden by the Holy Ghost, and the apostles and elders assembled at Jerusalem. But we feel called upon to protest against such a course, as being contrary to the plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Shall we lay a greater "burden" on the disciples than seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and the holy apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ? God forbid. Their decision, being right, settled the question with them, and was a cause of rejoicing among the churches, and it should forever settle the question with us.^{7,8}

Indeed, as James White states, the question should be forever settled by the ruling of the Holy Spirit through the council of Jerusalem. And if this is not enough, then it should certainly be put to rest by the word of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teachings of His apostles. If some still choose to abstain from eating certain foods for their own reasons, let them follow their path without judgement of others. Let it never be said that making distinctions between foods is a requirement of new covenant believers, an indication of spiritual health, or especially a requirement for baptism into the body of Christ. Those who would burden new covenant Christians with old covenant ceremonial rites and who would bar from fellowship those who disagree, must either support their views from the scriptural instructions provided to the Church, or reform their doctrines of bondage.⁹

Endnotes:

¹Gal. 4:9 — Paul is berating the Galatians for allowing themselves to be entrapped by the legalism of Judaizers.

²Baptismal Vows, #7, Certificate of Baptism [1980] (Takoma Park, Washington D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists).

³"If ever there was a time when the diet should be of the most simple kind, it is now. Meat should not be placed before our children. Its influence is to excite and strengthen the lower passions, and has a tendency to deaden the moral powers. Grains and fruits prepared free from grease, and in as natural a condition as possible, should be the food for the tables of all who claim to be preparing for translation to heaven." Ellen White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 352.

⁴For a thorough, yet easy to read and understand, Biblically based study on the covenants, see Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, p. 27–87 (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries). Also visit Pastor J. Mark Martin's Seventh-day Adventist Outreach web site at www.sdaoutreach.org.

⁵The Greek word translated "cleansed" in Acts 10:15 is *katharizo*. The same verb is used in Mark 7:19. See note #6 below.

⁶Some Christians who continue to adhere to old covenant food laws object to the inclusion of Mark's parenthetical explanatory statement. Their objection is based primarily on the fact that the translators of the King James Bible (published in 1611) rendered the original Greek as, "purging all meats." The transliterated Greek verb translated as "purging" in the KJV is *katharizo*. Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary states that the definition of *katharizo* is "to pronounce clean in a levitical sense." As it is used in Mark 7:19, *katharizo* is in present tense, masculine participle, and active voice. It should be noted that Greek writers often used verbs in present tense to describe past actions as a way of conveying immediacy and to provide vividness to the story telling. The masculine participle and active voice would seem to indicate that Jesus is the one producing the action. Given the Strong's definition of *katharizo*, as well as tense, mood, and voice, a reasonably transparent rendering of the Greek phrase could be, "He is pronouncing kosher all meats." My rather awkward but literal translation is in agreement with the approach used by nearly all modern translations in rendering *katharizo* as "He declared...clean" or other similar wording. This view of the Greek also makes it clear that these are the words of Mark describing the actions of Christ and therefore modern translators are correct to enclose this phrase in parenthesis as Mark's parenthetical explanatory statement.

⁷James White, *The Present Truth*, Vol. I, No. 11; Nov. 1850. "Swine's Flesh" Reproduced in Anderson, *White Out*, p. 93 (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries; 2001).

⁸Although Ellen G. White later became one of those who "added 'swine's flesh' to the catalogue of things forbidden by the Holy Ghost," she apparently at one time had agreed with her husband's views on the permissibility of pork. Ms. White wrote a testimony to a Mrs. Curtis in the 1850s criticizing the Curtis family for suggesting that pork consumption was wrong. "If God requires His people to abstain from swine's flesh, He will convict them on the matter. He is just as willing to show His honest children their duty, as to show their duty to individuals upon whom He has not laid the burden of His work. If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine's flesh, God will discover it to more than two or three. He will teach His church their duty." *Testimonies* Vol. 1, p. 206. EGW reversed herself in later testimonies after visiting Dr. Jackson's health institute in New York, "Never should one morsel of swine's flesh be placed upon your table." *Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 93. See also Dirk Anderson, *White Out*, pp. 92–97 (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries; 2001) and Anderson's Ellen G. White web site at www.ellenwhite.org.

⁹"Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. — Gal 4:1–7 (NASB)

My story “Why”

Steve Kurtright

Why would a fifty-one year old man choose to end a thirty-year career with an organization? Why would someone turn their “theological” back on a system of beliefs they had not only embraced personally, but taught and wrote about extensively? Why would a big fish in a little pond decide to give it up and begin again? Why would someone knowingly make a decision that would isolate himself from friends, peers, and community? Why give up a source of financial security for the unknown in this economy? In a word, grace.

From the beginning I was immersed in the ministry, leadership, and culture of the Church of God (Seventh Day). I served as a local pastor, the director of the national youth agency, district superintendent, as a member of the national board of directors, vice-president of the General Conference, as a member of the national ministerial documentation committee, a speaker and instructor for national conventions, councils, and extended learning programs, and finally as a seminary instructor.

My Resignation

In September of 2001 I resigned my membership and ministerial credential with the General Conference Church of God (Seventh Day) headquartered in Denver, Colorado. My wife, whose family membership and ministry with the church went back at least four generations, also resigned her membership.

The letter of resignation stated in part;

“After processing our spiritual and theological journey of the last six or eight years we concluded that we can no longer support the polity or works-oriented doctrine of the church. We believe that we are saved by grace alone through Christ alone. We believe that sin is no longer our master because we are no longer under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).

“It is my hope that one day the church will truly accept the gospel without qualification—that it will one day be truly Christ-centered and grace-based. For years Deborah has been asking God to forgive the church for its unwillingness to acknowledge the fullness of the gospel—asking God to bring repentance and renewal. However, we must be realistic and finally admit that a gospel-centered, Christ-centered church is the goal of a very few. This is beyond sad.

“Paul said anyone (including himself or angels) bringing a gospel PLUS message perverts the gospel and is “eternally condemned” (Galatians 1:6-9). The church’s message historically has been

a gospel plus message—the gospel plus Sabbath, tithing, clean meats, three days and three nights, correct Lord’s Supper date, etc. Strides have been made, but the undergirding theology of the church continues to struggle with a grace-based, Christ-centered message. This is evidenced by reactions to new covenant articles appearing in recent Forums¹ and the NAMC² resolution affirming the church’s position regarding the Ten Commandments and Sabbath observance as a part of the new covenant. That is heresy.

“We leave secure in our faith with no regrets. We embark on a life in which the gospel is the main thing. We affirm that the gospel is the good news that a loving God has taken the initiative to save us by grace alone, received through faith alone, based on the perfect life, atoning death and victorious resurrection of Jesus alone—plus nothing.”

Joining the True Church

Upon joining the Church of God (Seventh Day) in July 1970, I believed I had united with God’s one true church on earth. I could reason why everyone was lost except us. Sunday keepers, feast-day keepers, pork eaters, pagan day observers, believers in the Trinity, cross wearers, mixed swimmers, movie, dance and heaven goers were all eternally lost. Everyone had doctrinal error but me. The environment of the church encouraged me to believe that without a doubt I was “in the truth.”

I successfully mastered the unspoken language and code words of the church. I could state that Jesus saves, but understood that salvation was something I couldn’t really be sure of until the resurrection at the last day—and that to stay saved I had to keep the Sabbath and all the other doctrinal distinctives that set the church apart. I understood when people asked me when I came into the truth that this had nothing to do with my relationship with Jesus and everything to do with my correct doctrinal beliefs—and in particular the observance of Sabbath. Words such as Jesus and saved were rarely used because they sounded too protestant and evangelical. I learned to refer to Jesus as Lord, Christ, Savior, or better yet, Messiah. I knew the phrase keeping the commandments of God was code for Sabbath keeping. Very rarely, if ever, were others outside our denominational circle referred to as Christians or believers; the terms of choice were Babylon or the world. I preached

the gospel; however, in the Seventh-day Church of God the gospel is understood to be everything the Bible teaches—it is not understood denominationally as salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus.

The denominational culture is one of legalism. That legalistic culture is evidenced by an emphasis on correct doctrine—on correct prophetic understanding, correct diet, correct observances, correct dates and communion emblems. The emphasis is reflected in the wording of doctrinal statements such as Sabbath, The Ten Commandments, Lord’s Supper, Pagan Holidays, Clean and Unclean Foods, State of the Dead, Financial Stewardship, The Regathering of Israel, and the Kingdom.

Becoming Grace-Based

My “aha” moment was theological in nature. I became keenly aware of the contrast between the new and old covenants while studying 2 Corinthians 3. From that point on there was no stopping the journey. The new covenant with its emphasis on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus suddenly filled my every theological thought. I now understand that the issues that dominated my thinking and the thinking of the

The denominational culture is one of legalism. That legalistic culture is evidenced by an emphasis on correct doctrine – on correct prophetic understanding, correct diet, correct observances, correct dates and communion emblems.

denomination I was a part of were issues of covenant.

I now understand that grace is the basis of my salvation. Grace has always been the basis for my salvation, but now I realize it and can say it without qualification or reservation. My focus was on obeying the Law. My concept of being a worthy son of God was to avoid doing wrong things and



making sure I did the right things. Today I know that it is by grace I come.

The Deciding Factor

In October, 2000, the North American Ministerial Council met in Glorieta, New Mexico. Four of us were asked by the president of that body to present studies addressing the issue of the covenants for informational purposes only. It was published well in advance of the meeting that no action was to be taken on these studies. That decision was made in an attempt to alleviate

... Jesus is our Sabbath rest. That conclusion has nothing to do with observing one day over the other. It is not a Sabbath or Sunday issue – it is a covenant issue. It is a gospel issue. It is a salvation issue.

fears that supposedly were circulating in the field that the church was preparing to abandon the Sabbath.

Two of the studies closely represented the church's present understanding of the covenants and two of them contrasted the two covenants and introduced the ramifications of understanding the differences between them. My particular study concentrated on how the New Testament identified and contrasted the covenants. In spite of assurances that no action would be taken, the council adopted a statement affirming the church's obedience of the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath as part of the new covenant. The reason given for the need to adopt such a statement was so the brethren in the field would be assured the council was not entertaining any suggestion of abandoning the observance of the Sabbath.

In time, this statement came to represent a closing of the doctrinal creed of the church to me. While the official position of the denomination is that the doctrinal statements of the church do not represent a closed creed, the current reality is a different matter. The line had been drawn in the sand—and that line was the Sabbath.

One year later I crossed the line and stated in the resignation letter, "We no longer believe that the covenant made at Sinai is binding on believers (2 Corinthians 3; Galatians 4:21-31). This includes the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. We no longer believe Sabbath observance is binding on believers—Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:9-11). That conclusion has nothing to do with observing one day over the other. It is not a Sabbath or Sunday issue—it is a covenant issue. It is a gospel issue. It is a salvation issue."

Conclusion

This testimony is not intended to berate any individual(s) or their faith. This is the story of my journey. Why share it now? There was a time during my journey when I was willing to mix a little old covenant into my life. No doubt there are others who are attempting to do the same. However, the New Testament warns us to give up law-based lives or suffer significant spiritual consequences. True faith requires an absolutely clean break from the old covenant, replacing it with a radically new and different approach to one's commitment to Jesus. This is what Jesus had in mind when he said, "But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." Matthew 9:16,17 (NASB) Jesus did not come to patch up the old covenant. He provided a new garment, not a repair job on the old one. Nor did he come to fit into the old system, but to replace it. Like new wine, Jesus and the new covenant are too powerful and alive to be confined by the old. Now you know why. !

Endnotes:

¹The Ministerial Forum is a publication of the North American Ministerial Council containing studies for the consideration of the ministerial body of the General Conference Church of God (Seventh Day).

²North American Ministerial Council. This body hears and reviews doctrinal studies. They too are responsible for making doctrinal changes to the beliefs of the church. This body drafted and approved a resolution in October 2000 that affirmed the Conference's observance of the Ten Commandments and the seventh day Sabbath as a part of the New Covenant.

Calvary's story CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Church is influencing the spiritual growth of tens of thousands of Christians in the metropolitan Phoenix area, one of the fastest growing cities in America. This summer Calvary opened a 30,000 square foot state-of-the-art children's ministry building with over 100 classes offered each week.

While celebrating Calvary's present vitality, Pastor Mark remembers well its humble beginnings. "We started with 11 people on our first Sunday morning in a rented school band room. Everything went wrong. The janitor was an hour late and we were left waiting outside in the oppressive summer heat. But through it all, God was planting the seeds of a growing community of believers."

Calvary stayed small for more than seven years, fluctuating between 25 and 60 people. The lessons that Mark personally learned during the early days of Calvary Community Church still guide his ministry today. "During those early years I learned that when God guides, God pro-



God graciously pulled me out of the stifling environment of the Adventist Church. I see that what some intended to do to harm me was really God's way of opening up new avenues of meaningful ministry.

—Mark Martin

vides. I learned the difference between ministry in the flesh and a Spirit-led ministry, a lesson that I had never learned in Adventism. I also learned that teaching the Bible verse by verse builds the Church of God on a firm foundation. Digging into God's Word makes people spiritually healthy and alive. Calvary has grown because God has touched lives through His Word and empowered people through His Spirit."

The striking characteristic of life at Calvary is its atmosphere of grace. Pastor Mark has endeavored with the Spirit's strength to build grace into the culture of Calvary Community Church.

Raised a fifth generation Adventist, Mark knows the stifling effects of an atmosphere of law. He vividly remembers the legalistic, controlling and judgmental approach to religious life within Adventism. Because of his background, Mark diligently teaches the people of Calvary to be people of grace.

The Bible reminds us that the strength of sin is the law, but we are not under the law but under grace. When people are living a performance-based Christian life trying to earn and hold on to their salvation and security in Christ, they have a tendency to hold back when it comes to radical discipleship to Jesus. A fear of failure prohibits people from experiencing the joy of living with the safety net of grace.

During the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, several workers fell to their deaths. This had a debilitating effect on productivity and morale for the rest of the workers. Engineers decided to solve this problem by installing a safety net under the workers for their personal well-being. As a result, the productivity of the workers soared. They could now work freely without fear because they had a safety net under them.

The finished work of Christ and the message of His grace is that safety net for believers. We can faithfully and joyfully serve Jesus without the fear of condemnation, because His grace secures us. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1).

This atmosphere of grace is frequently experienced at Calvary. Many times people enter the sanctuary and during the time of worship their hearts are moved to the point of tears by the loving and accepting tenderness of God expressed through the worship of God's people and the ministry of the Word. Since 1995, nearly 8,000 people have made decisions for Christ and over 2,000 people have been baptized as God has worked through the ministry of Calvary to call people to a close and intimate relationship with Him. It is not uncommon to see hundreds of people make decisions for Christ each month at Calvary. In 2001, over 500 people made decisions for Christ on the weekend of Resurrection Sunday alone!

God continues to raise up former Adventist pastors who understand the Gospel as well as the pertinent theological issues that separate Adventism from biblical Christianity.

On the Saturday marking the 20th anniversary of their leaving Adventism, Mark took his three children back to the Adventist Church where he had first pastored when he was forced to resign the Adventist ministry. "I wanted them to know what we had left so they would appreciate even more the spiritual blessings they now enjoy. We slipped into the church into one of the middle pews. I don't think anyone noticed who I was. Halfway through the sermon the pastor looked directly at me and said that he believed 'The most accurate construct of truth is Seventh-day Adventism, but we should all have the guts to move where we believe it's truest' [sic]."

When he reflects on that May afternoon in the office of the Conference President, Mark is reminded of the faithfulness of God. "Joseph's brothers mistreated and betrayed him and

wanted to seriously harm him. But after seeing God's plan unfold, Joseph was able to say, 'You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good' (Genesis 50:12). God graciously pulled me out of the stifling environment of the Adventist Church. I see that what some intended to do to harm me was really God's way of opening up new avenues of meaningful ministry.

God's hand is obviously at work at Calvary. We are also encouraged by what we have seen in the last five years. God continues to raise up former Adventist pastors who understand the Gospel as well as the pertinent theological issues that separate Adventism from biblical Christianity. Their testimonies and ministries are bountiful evidence that there is abundant life after Adventism. Calvary Community Church is a testimony to the power of God's grace." !

Tape R E V I E W

The Stonecutter's Bride or Abraham, Messenger to the 21st Century

by Sam Pestes

Sam Pestes, former Adventist pastor in British Columbia, has written three volumes entitled *The Stonecutter's Bride*. It is now available under a new title: *Abraham, Messenger to the 21st Century*. Highlights from Volumes #1 and #2 are now available on seven cassette tapes or CDs. This was done by a professional reader with a delightful English accent.

The topic is Judao-Christianity. It includes studies on the Abrahamic Covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant, the Everlasting Covenant, Romans, Galatians, Israel and more. It is presented in an attention-grabbing discussion format.

I found it so interesting, informative and challenging that I listened to the whole set three times and will go through it again. Every time through, I found new insights. If you are looking for clarity regarding law and grace, faith and works, old and new covenants, Christianity and Judaism, Jew and Israel, then this set is for you.

This is the most persuasive presentation of the new covenant gospel I have ever heard. It will make an excellent ministry tool to share with others. It can be ordered in Canada directly from Sam Pestes at (250) 765-5121 or by email at s.pestes@shaw.ca. You can also download the study from <http://www.abraham911.com>. In the USA call (800) 355-7073 or <http://www.ratzlaff.com> in the LAM Publications Bookstore.

—Dale Ratzlaff, editor

Is leaving Adventism all that great? CONTINUED FROM BACK

for in John 13–17? Wasn't this the precursor to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?

So, I hate to say it, but we have had to jump on the bandwagon with others who have left Adventism: but for different reasons. Not that we had not experienced Jesus in the SDA church. We had. It was this love for the Lord that brought us to study deeper into God's will for our lives. But we are experiencing a deepening of our walk with Him and a growing soul hunger for lost people that drives us to unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the cause of prayer for the renewal that has been promised in the Latter Rain.

Part of the reason, we have discovered, is the last section of Galatians four. There the blessing of Isaac is contrasted with the blessing of Ishmael. Both sons of Abraham were blessed. But the son of the promise was blessed far more abundantly because he was the result of faith. In the context it is clear that law keeping, including Sabbath observance (Gal 4:10) is symbolized by Hagar and Ishmael. Faith is symbolized by Sarah and Isaac (whose name, incidentally, means laughter!) We had been living under Ishmael's blessing instead of Isaac's and had not known it.

Sabbath is a salvation issue

Now we know what our good SDA brothers and sisters will say to that. We know what we used to say. "Oh I do not believe that Sabbath is a salvation issue. I just believe it honors God and so I keep it as a special day."

Unfortunately, we discovered, this kind of thinking was more our own special understanding of a "Neo-Adventism" than the official teaching of the church. Let us repeat that for emphasis sake. This "not a salvation issue" concept is not the official teaching of the SDA church. In fact, in his recent address entitled "The Theological Landscape," GC President Paulsen, makes it perfectly clear that the church does believe it is a salvation issue.

In section 4, paragraph 2, of his address to the world leaders (April–May 2002), and sponsored by the Biblical Research Institute, he writes, "We shun the perception of being arrogant, and we don't want to come across as being overly exclusive, but at the same time we believe that being Seventh-day Adventists has direct bearing on our salvation; that while a believer can be saved as a Catholic, I would risk my whole spiritual life and salvation were I to leave what I am now and join any other community."

This is not an isolated statement taken out of context. I would urge every honest SDA to look at what the top official of the church is saying, and see what is in the document that they will be sending to all Adventists and making extra copies for further distribution. This may not be readily admitted to their on-looking friends in the evangelical community, but this is truly what the Adventist church believes.

Adventism is not changing as some would like to believe. Read the article www.adventistreview.org/2002-1524/story3.html and

see for yourself. Is it any wonder that God cannot bless fully with the laughter of Isaac those who make their brand of Biblical understanding a salvation issue for anyone that has been exposed to it? This is in direct contradiction to the passage of Galatians just cited, and the whole message of John 13–17.

We would like to add one more observation. When we first started to research the other side of Adventism, We came across sites like www.ratzlaf.com, and www.SDAoutreach.org and others. We thought these were just a bunch of wounded, disgruntled, former Adventists, just trying to get back at the church.

It is true that there are some hard hitting things said on these sites that are hard to look at. The spirit behind the research, nevertheless, is to help people steeped in a closed system see beyond it to God's loving and wider purpose for reaching the world.

...WE BELIEVE THAT BEING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS HAS DIRECT BEARING ON OUR SALVATION; THAT WHILE A BELIEVER CAN BE SAVED AS A CATHOLIC, I WOULD RISK MY WHOLE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND SALVATION WERE I TO LEAVE WHAT I AM NOW AND JOIN ANY OTHER COMMUNITY."

—JON PAULSEN, PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

We have personally spent a great deal of time meeting with, talking to, and examining the fruit of what these people are doing. We can testify that the heart of these ministries is one of genuine love and compassion for those still caught in fear, confusion, or simply the blessing of Ishmael. It is not about trying to hurt anyone, but rather a desire to share the larger picture of God's love. What kind of Christians would any of us be if we did not try to share the joy of freedom in Jesus with everyone we meet?

There truly are many within the Adventist church who love Jesus as much as any outside that system. Yet so many are not experiencing the fullness of what Jesus has offered through His all sufficient sacrifice on the cross.

We are so grateful for those who have taken the time to share with us. We have been prayed with, studied with, patiently listened to and loved in our process. We found that what they discovered in God's word cost them everything too. They are investing in this work at tremendous personal cost and time commitment. We are now experiencing the blessing that comes with the discovery of, and following of, that truth. We are so grateful for people who love Jesus enough and love Adventists enough to take the heat and criticism to tell the truth. We will be eternally grateful!

May God richly bless every person in the seeking process. God is faithful!

I can see how we gradually become brain washed

I am enclosing a check for your much needed work on "Waking-up Adventists." Having been an Adventist for over 22 years, I can see how we gradually become brain washed by our Sabbath School lessons, preaching of sincere pastors and evangelists, etc. It's more comfortable to go "along with the flow." As I look at world events and the countries that combine church and state, where to even pray or mention Jesus will get you put in prison, even tortured and killed, I don't see a Catholic leadership among them. As Adventists fearfully wait for this combination of Protestants and Catholics to form a Sunday law—I think "Adventists aren't brain-washed, they are just plain stupid!" My only comfort is to know God is in control. While Adventists are waiting for a Sunday law, several billion Muslims are determined to destroy Christianity (and Judaism) and impose a Friday law. I think of the three worthies on the plane of Dura (Daniel). How long do you think they would last today if they didn't bow down to Mecca? May God give us all guidance and wisdom in how to love a Muslim terrorist before he kills us.

Never experienced the genuine experience of being a Seventh-day Adventist

I just received your latest edition of *Proclamation* magazine, it is with some degree of interest that I have read the text at the bottom of the page, Ephesians 2:8,9. This has been a text that has truly revolutionized my preaching over the last few years as well. As I have studied this text, I have found it to give renewed power to the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Truly, rather than contradicting its teachings, I have found it to completely support and empower that which God has given us as a message for the end times. The Sabbath, in the context of Ephesians 2, comes as a constant reminder to me of this salvation that comes by the grace of God. The rest spoken of in Hebrews 4 reminds me on a weekly basis that I am truly saved by grace. It is my hope and prayer that you someday will come to see that there truly is no contraction here, and that the Sabbath

will be able to become the blessing in your life that it continues to be in mine. It is clear to me that there has been some serious conflict between yourselves and others in our church, and I am always saddened to see the results of this type of conflict. I pray that the day will come when your relationship will be restored, and you will be able to see your way clear to be reunited with your family. The fact that some feel a sense of freedom in separating from the Adventist church tells me that they have truly never experienced the genuine experience of being a Seventh-day Adventist, but had been drawn off by some other element in the Adventist church which truly did not reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ that was

given to our church to proclaim. I hope that you will someday find the true joy of the genuine. (From a SDA pastor)

I could stay in the class if I turned the ring around

We left the SDA church about 8 years ago. I graduated from Walla Walla College, but in all my years in the system I always felt like I was never good enough. I was even asked to leave a class at college because I was wearing an engagement ring. I was then told I could stay in the class if I turned the ring around so no one could see the diamond. I tell you, what hypocrisy. The list is endless. Thank you for your magazine, and please keep us on your mailing list.

It has shaken me to the core

I was born into a SDA family 51 years ago and until a couple of years ago I was content in my faith. A series of events led up to my questioning my own belief system. About 18 months ago, I was packing my mother up to move in with me, as she was not able to live alone any longer. As I went through her papers and magazines, I ran across your magazine. It was mixed in with her other religious SDA publications and at first I thought it was just another one until I read the title which was something like "Is there life after Sabbath?"

Because I was in a spiritual transition (and didn't even know it), the article caught my attention. I read it and shared it with my sister who was also helping to pack mom up for the move. We were both in shock! Where did mom get this! Mom was a devout Adventist and would have considered this heresy. Because her mind was pretty much gone, it would have been useless to ask her where she got it.

My sister had already given up the Sabbath belief years before, and though she never pushed her beliefs on me, she did share why she was convinced in her own mind the new covenant way of thinking and worshiping.

She believes that God allowed me to find that magazine. It has shaken me to the core. I can only digest small amounts of study at a time because it disturbs me so.

Not because I find it so hard to accept the New Covenant, but because I feel so deceived. The more I study, the more I find the truths that the Adventist church so cleverly hides. It hurts to think that I could have been following a "cult" belief and that so many are being led astray.

I have many close friends that are SDA and I want to help them understand that the questions they have do make sense and that they need to approach this new way of thinking with an open heart and mind.

Now when I study and read the Bible I feel a peace and contentment I haven't felt before. It's like I am a brand new Christian! It's a wonderful feeling. I feel a freedom that is so exhilarating.

I know Satan can deceive in insidious ways, and I pray sincerely every day that God will show me the truth and that I will know if this "feeling" is from God and that it is not Satan's deception. I know. I just know that God is opening my eyes and my heart to accept the truth that has been diverted from me for so many years.

I am so thankful for your publication. I look forward to getting it, and I read it cover to cover. I copy some articles and share them with those that I feel might read and at least question their own beliefs. It has been interesting to see people's reaction as they admit that they had been in turmoil about some of the things the church has been teaching and doing. If nothing less, it has been a source of some terrific conversation and study.

It sharpens my skills in defending the Sabbath

I enjoy your publication for it sharpens my skills in defending the Sabbath. You have yet to explain the Sabbath in Eden. God says He made the Sabbath holy and sanctified before sin! Either God was tired after six days of work or He was setting an example for Adam and Eve and all mankind. If sin had never happened, we, you, and all mankind would still be keeping the Sabbath. Why should God change his plan for man? Now my big question: What is your theology of Sunday???

1. Does God want us to "keep" a 24 day for rest and holy activities?
2. Does a day begin at sunset or midnight?
3. Does holding a "holy convocation" (KJV) or "sacred assembly" (NIV) help us to keep a day holy?
4. Does "rest" help us keep a day holy?
5. Do you hold services on Sunday in order to keep Sunday holy?
6. Do you hold services on Sunday evening or Saturday evening in order to honor Sunday?
7. Is there anything that you would not do on Sunday that you would do on other days?

If you will address these questions please continue my subscription. So far, it appears that you are only following Protestant tradition and don't have clear theology under what you do on Sunday.

Editor's Note: You ask some good questions. I suggest that you purchase *Sabbath in Crisis, The Sabbath and the Lord's Day* and download Dr. Streifling's *Bible Answers to Sabbath Questions* for in-depth answers. However, here are mine in brief:

1. Not necessarily.
2. What difference does it make?
3. I no longer believe in "holy days," rather I worship a Holy God every day!
4. Probably not.
5. No, We hold services on Sunday as a voluntary celebration of the resurrection of Christ.
6. No. We do this to honor the Living Christ!
7. I think it is a good practice to have a day to focus on God but that can be

any day. Sons of God live in the freedom of the sons of God. They do not need grade school rules to outline their time and activities by a rigid, unbending schedule. (Read Galatians 4:1-11)

It makes me sad

I received another copy of your *Proclamation*. It makes me sad to find that these people who are so under the influence of Satan that they are recruiting others to follow him too. You talk about Grace but you show you don't understand English. Grace only exists because there is law. When God created this world He established law and order. Lucifer rebelled against his creator and influenced many

You talk about Grace but you show you don't understand English. Grace only exists because there is law.

angels to join his rebellion. They were cast out of heaven to this earth. Fortunately for us Jesus paid the penalty for your sins and mine. We must accept the offered forgiveness and promised strength through the Holy Spirit in order to receive eternal life. He didn't change any of His original laws but He promised to guide us to stop listening to Satan and his angels.

Praise God for providing us the grace of Jesus Christ!

I just finished reading *Sabbath in Crisis*. I have been receiving the *Proclamation* magazine for several months. Thank you for these insightful and appropriate materials. I received baccalaureate degrees from Pacific Union College in 1975 in theology and English and was raised in a legalistic Seventh-day Adventist home. In college, I started having second thoughts about many SDA doctrines including the

investigative judgment, sabbatarianism, "salvation by grace plus keeping the Ten Commandments," and constant discussions ("arguments") over proper Sabbath observance and SDA entertainment. After graduating, I made a decision to leave the SDA church, but was plagued by the guilt of leaving the "remnant church." Unfortunately, I also decided to toss Christianity out with the bath water because I equated "Christ" with "the SDA church." The next 25 years of my life were spent following a life of sin, but blaming God for my problems. Fortunately, I had some life changing events from late 1997 through early 2000 which God used to get my attention. I finally decided that only Christ could forgive my sins and provide the "rest" that my soul needed. I started attending a local evangelical church in late 1999 and gave my life to Christ on March 5, 2000. Now, I'm involved on the board of directors of starting another Bible-believing church in Clark County, Washington. It's so nice to experience the true Sabbath "rest" that you write about in your book and not gauge my life by the legalistic "do's and don'ts" that governed my childhood. My family remains mostly SDA and I'm seen as an apostate. My father recently challenged me to "write out" my beliefs on the Sabbath and send them to him. In addition, I wanted to ready a systemic evaluation of the Sabbath from a biblical perspective. So, I ordered your book! Thank you for your thoughtful and careful biblical analysis of this issue. I'm going to read the book again and use it as a basis for discussion with my family.

Keep up the great ministry to former SDA's. Praise God for providing us the grace of Jesus Christ! —*Donald G. Grant (permission given to use name)*

I have learned a great deal from your materials

My wife is free of Adventism. We now serve as missionaries with Campus Crusade for Christ Military Ministry. I will try and support your ministry as we can; however, we too raise support. I have learned a great deal from your materials.

At death the Spirit leaves the body and returns to God

Greetings! I agree with your recent *Proclamation* article "The Dead Know Nothing." Seventh-day Adventists regularly quote Ecclesiastes out of context, but each book of the Bible must be understood in its proper historical context... Personally, I don't see how Ecclesiastes supports any SDA 'state of the dead' theory. Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes simply questions the dark nature of human existence according to human understanding. It is not Divine Wisdom and it does not give us any definite answers to the mysteries of God.

12:7, simply reiterates Genesis 2:7, that at death the Spirit leaves the body and returns to God. However, what ultimately happens to the soul, the author himself admits that he does not know! (Ecclesiastes 3:19-21). So I agree with your article in that Ecclesiastes 9:5, does not prove anything! The author is merely stating a fact that is obvious from the human perspective, that is, that a dead body has no conscious awareness or discernment. Obviously, the author is right, but it doesn't prove that the soul no longer exists! The book of Ecclesiastes simply questions the dark nature of human existence according to human understanding. It is not Divine Wisdom and it does not give us any definite answers to the mysteries of God. What the Seventh-day Adventist Church does is to take the author's philosophical disputations and translate them to be the literal Word of God, when the author himself

clearly never does this! Thank you for a great article.

Thank you...the info on *The Clear Word* Bible. I am happy and contented in my new non-denominational church. My husband joined two weeks ago. My heart is committed to Christ and I will continue to pray for your ministry.

Do so in its entirety

I have observed that those who leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church over doctrinal issues must eventually conclude that the Bible itself is unreliable as a guide for truth. In your May/June 2002 issue, Jerry A. Gladson gives a very eloquent argument for dismissing selected portions of scripture. He ends up arguing that truth on the subject of death is something about which we can disagree, which I suppose means that he thinks the truth is unimportant. I also suppose that the fact you have printed his article means that your organization agrees with Dr. Gladson in his conclusion that the Bible cannot be trusted, and we must be careful regarding which of its teachings we accept as true. I, in contrast to your article, accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God, because I cannot accept that One Who can create and sustain the universe is too weak or disinterested to keep watch over His own word. If you print this letter, please do so in its entirety, so that there may not be any doubt among your readers as to where I stand on this issue. (from a SDA pastor)

Editor's note: I don't think your observations are really true. I know many former (not all) SDA pastors who have a much more conservative view of inspiration than do many SDA pastors. It has been my experience that many SDA pastors have become very liberal in their view of inspiration to allow for the many historical, factual and theological errors, plagiarism, self contradictions and biblical contradictions in the writings of Ellen White.

He returned next week and asked for more

Praise the Lord for *Proclamation!* Each one is better than the last. I had shared with you about the brother in Ghana who had left SDA (Satan Deceives Again) and how harshly he had been treated. I received a

letter the other day with the good news that one of the harshest critics had come to him and asked him to share with him how he found the true Christ and the Grace of God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave him "Sabbath in Crisis." He returned the next week and asked for more help. The next day he left the church! God's blessings in all you do.

Many still think of it as obedience to rules

I appreciated the article by Greg Taylor, "Has the Sabbath Become our Christ?" As a [SDA] pastor myself I believe it is true, that we often focus so much on the fourth commandment that we leave the impression that the Sabbath is more important to us than the beautiful character of Jesus and His love. While there are a good number in the church who do see the Christian religion as fellowship with Jesus, there are many who still think of it as obedience to rules. I believe Pastor Taylor was right on target in suggesting our need to emphasize Christ Jesus, as "the great center of attraction." While I believe Taylor's article was pointing out a real need in our church, I was disappointed that a recent article in *Proclamation* uses the statements of early church fathers of questionable theology in various areas, as evidence that the early church was keeping Sunday and thus this is proof we should too. The church of Rome uses tradition as a basis for their beliefs. Evangelical Christians base beliefs on a "Thus saith the Lord." It would be incredible to think that if God intended that the first day of the week should be kept in honor of Christ's resurrection or for whatever reason, He would not have thought it necessary to include such an instruction in the New Testament. To argue because the disciples broke bread on the first day of the week, Acts 20:7, is proof of Sunday sacredness, is just as much evidence to justify such an inference as the fact they "daily" broke bread as it says in Acts 2:46. We might as well observe the Lord's Supper on Thursday night because this was the occasion of the first communion supper if we are going to read this into the verse. Finally there are two things we do know. Hundreds of Protestant ministers have become SDA preachers because of the absence of any instruction to

keep Sunday, and because they recognized that the desires of the church fathers, after Paul passed from the scene, was to rid the church of anything that savored of the Jewish religion. Without any directive from the Lord about keeping Sunday holy, early traditions and argument by inference are one's only resorts, it would seem. How sad. (From SDA Pastor)

Editors Note: We do not see Sunday as a holy or sacred day. When we worship, we worship the Risen Lord, not the day. We usually chose Sunday in honor of the Resurrection—the greatest event in world history. This is a voluntary celebration of the grace offered and accepted. Any day is appropriate to worship God, for new covenant Christians, Sunday has always had special significance but not as another Sabbath.

Our families thought we were crazy

God pulled my husband and I out of the SDA church in 1997. While both our families thought we were crazy, our departure led my mother and sister-in-law

I am perfectly satisfied with the beliefs of the SDA church

I would appreciate it very much if you would take me off your mailing list. The minute I started reading this publication of yours I knew I did not want it in my home. I am perfectly satisfied with the beliefs of the SDA church and I feel it is the true church preaching the true gospel.

I am sorry that you do not believe in Ellen G. White. Enough of her writings have come true to prove to me that she was definitely appointed by the Lord to enlighten His true church. She does not claim to take the place of the Bible but only to make the Bible more clear.

As for the Sabbath the Lord Himself sanctified it and I cannot find a reason not to keep it when it was written by the God Himself on tables of stone way back in Moses day and the Lord Himself kept it and that is good enough for me.

I feel bad that you are misleading people who are seeking for the truth

to the Bible to research SDA issues. When they found your books, Sabbath in Crisis and the Cultic Doctrine and studied for themselves, they also became very convicted to leave [the] SDA [church]. Now I'm sending these books to my mother and a close friend. Please stand in prayer with us that these books will open their eyes and they will not be deceived any longer. May God richly bless you ministry!!!

Growing up the son of a Union Conference Officer

I am enclosing a donation for the support of Life Assurance Ministries. Growing up the son of a Union Conference Officer I have been aware of the politics and inconsistencies within the domination. *Proclamation!* is fresh air and food for the soul.

What a breath of fresh air!

Thanks so much. What a breath of fresh air! I was so thankful to have received your newsletter in the mail today. I couldn't put it down. Great to know there are other for-

and someday you will be held responsible for that. I think people who are picking the church and its doctrines apart are trying to find excuses for what they don't want to do and they want to do their own thing. If you truly love the Lord with all your heart you would obey Him out of love for Him.

So, no more of this magazine please!! I just hope someday you will wake up yourself and see the real truth for what it really is. If it isn't the truth then why are thousands and thousands being baptized all over the world? We would not be growing at the rate we are if we did not have the truth. I will stay with the main body and follow Christ to the end. I think our relationship with Him is most important and if we are right with Him He will show us the truth and set us free. I love the church, it's wonderful people and leadership and I find no fault with it whatsoever.

Editor's note: Mormonism is also growing very fast, slightly faster than Adventism.

mer Adventists who have "seen" the true gospel. I have tried to talk to my father and others in the family about the real gospel message to no avail. They can only see the world through a strict, legalistic, Adventist perspective. Our "discussions" turn into loud arguments. I feel such an ache to get him to understand the liberating truth of the real gospel. He only feels pity that I have been so deluded! How odd. I know you understand. This has been playing out for 2000 years. In short, I am a fourth generation Adventist on both sides of the family, trained in the Adventist school system from first grade through Loma Linda Medical School and am a practicing Internist in _____. I love the people and "The Adventist Institution"—school system, medical system, etc., and would not want that system destroyed by "the truth" for the simple reason that I want my alma maters to remain in good standing. I realize that is very selfish. I certainly would wish that the people of the church would see and experience the true love of the living God through Jesus Christ. It would be much better in every way for them of course. Ideally I would have the Adventist Church evolve into a Bible-only, grace-only church though I fear The Church and "The Institutions" would cease to exist if "the truth" became widely accepted. I have read every story on your site, tears with each story I read. They have said everything I could say very well so I will conclude for now.

I save each one to use for further reference

We love your magazine. I save each one to use for further reference. We are former SDAs and have been "free" since the early 1980s. Praise the Lord! We have many friends and family who are still bound in the church and its legalism. We pray for them daily. Keep up the good work.

Mail letters and donations to:

**Life Assurance Ministries
PO Box 11587
Glendale, AZ 85318**

Is leaving Adventism all that great?

by Greg Taylor

One thing I noticed as a common experience shared by those who have left Adventism, is the freedom and joy in the Gospel that is expressed. When I first came across these testimonies as an Adventist pastor in the process of deeper study, I would get a little miffed by them. I figured that these poor people had not experienced grace, and had been burned by the SDA church. In their process of disillusionment, they had come to know Jesus, so they then interpreted their experience as normative for everyone. They were simply generalizing their experience and projecting onto others. They might truly believe that grace was not to be found within the SDA church, but they just were tainted by their own experiences.

My personal reaction to these testimonials was negative to say the least. I was irritated by this generalization and expressed it on occasion on various "Contact Us" segments of these web sites. I even got a bit preachy on one site and told the people in that organization that they needed to "get a life" and "go about the work of God" and "stop cutting down what God is doing in another field of harvest." I was an Adventist leader with a true and genuine relationship with the Lord and was growing and flourishing.

Led to leave ministry within the SDA church

Eventually my wife and I were led by God to leave our position in ministry within the SDA church to follow our convictions. This was a painful and difficult process because we loved our congregation and always will. We have a deep love and heart for the denomination we served for 20 years.

We did not leave because we did not know Christ within the Adventist church. We left because we had discovered that the absolutes within that system were not morally binding for all time as they teach, and the insistence on making such things as Sabbath observance an essential part of what it means to be Christian placed an unnecessary roadblock in the path of new people coming to Jesus. (Romans 14:5-6, Gal. 4:10, Col 2:16-17) We still do not have an issue with those who choose to take

Saturday as a Sabbath experience with the Lord. It is the moral "ought" attached to it that we can no longer teach as binding.

Having said all that, we have an unusual experience to share. We too, have been abundantly blessed with a deepening experience with the Lord, far greater than we ever knew before. During the seven and one half months we were without visible means of support, God sustained us in ways that would be impossible to describe in these few short paragraphs. God sent us resources from places we could never have thought of. Money came in the mail, old friends we had not seen in years contacted us, impressed to send money. Our cars, older models, stopped needing repairs. Unexpected refunds came to us. We are not kidding! Modern day miracles were happening right in front of our eyes. Our car expenses in maintenance had been running about \$300 per month and the expenses virtually ceased during those months. God is faithful when we follow Him. 1 Sam. 2:30 says "Those who honor Me, I will honor!" In other words, where God leads, He provides.

The church where we are now serving has a heart for God and a deep prayer experience. There is an earnestness for the Lord that I never saw in Adventism. Even though we had pastored in one of the most alive churches in our region, there had been something missing. We had prayed and sought the Lord. We had taken the Gospel commission seriously, but something had been missing.

Churches banding together in prayer

Now, in our new ministry assignment we are seeing that our heart for prayer and worship is shared by a significant segment of the Christian community. Churches of all denominations are banding together to pray for renewal and revival. They are laying aside non-essentials and banding together for the cause of reaching the world for Christ. Isn't this what Jesus was longing

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