

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES, INC

# Proclamation!

VOLUME 3

ISSUE 2

MARCH

APRIL

2002

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

## Transitioning to the New Covenant

Clay Peck

Some of you transitioned long ago. Some of you transitioned more recently. Some of you are still in the process of transitioning or will soon transition. Some of you will never transition (and no one is going to make you!). Some of you never had to transition—you grew up with it.

disk drive. I remember being amazed when he told me he could store a whole book on that new machine. Wow!

At that time I felt that a good electric typewriter was all I needed. I guess I resisted changing over to computer dependence. The old way served me fine. Maybe some of you can relate to that. Change is difficult for most of us humans.

It was difficult for me to transition into the computer age (sometimes it still is!). Of course, the change has been for the better—increased productivity, access to massive amounts of information, efficient communication via email, etc.—*but change is not easy, even if it is for the better!*

Early Christians coming out of Judaism faced a major transition: transitioning to the new covenant. The New Testament has a lot to say about the stress, strain, controversy and adaptation—the plain, old-fashioned, painful change—that was necessary in order to transition from the old covenant to the new covenant.

When Jesus came, he ratified a new covenant of grace that was for any person, of any race, who entered through faith into His finished accomplishment. The new covenant replaced the old

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

### *For Jews who became Christians a transition was necessary.*

What am I talking about? I'm referring to the *computer* and how computers have become more and more a part of our daily lives.

As much as I use a computer on a daily basis—to communicate, do research, study the Bible, write letters, and prepare sermons and other documents—it is hard for me to believe that I did not even own a computer during my college days in the early 1980s. I remember some friends getting computers and they had to store all their information on large “floppy disks.” Then one of my friends purchased a new computer with a hard

#### CONTENTS

2

Letter from Oregon

3

Encountering the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus

6

The role of conscience in Christian freedom

15

Conquering the Giant

20

After Adventism... What a life!

### 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

## Letter from Oregon

**B**ecause two of my articles are included in this *Proclamation*, I will keep my comments here to a minimum. Readers will be happy to know that we have several good things in the pipeline. Dr. Richard Fredericks, former SDA theologian and now pastor of the growing Damascus Road Community Church in Damascus, Maryland has consented to write an article entitled, "Life In the Spirit." Dr. Jerry Gladson, former SDA theologian

*I knew that it was a matter of time before I would be asked to "tone down" the divisive message of Christ plus nothing.*

and now pastor of the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Marietta, Georgia will write on "The Dead Know Nothing: A Re-examination of Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 And The State of Humanity In Death." Both of these articles we believe will be of great interest to "Formers."

We at LAM, Inc. want to again express our sincere thanks to so many of you who are faithfully supporting this ministry. Without you this ministry could not exist. We invite our readers to partner with us in prayer that God will continue to provide the funds needed to keep publishing *Proclamation*, and guide us who write so that we will be faithful to the Word of God and the good news in Christ!

If you are living near Grants Pass, Oregon and looking for a church which focuses on the gospel I invite you to read the following letter from Toni Russo and check out Blessed Hope Fellowship. You can reach Pastor Russo at 541-471-2980.

In 1984 the Spirit revealed the true gospel to me. I remained in the Adventist church with the hope of sharing this freedom in Christ with my friends. Many others were initially thrilled by what seemed to them "new light." In time I was offered a position as an associate pastor. I knew that it was a matter of time before I would be asked to "tone down" the divisive message of Christ plus nothing. When I didn't, things came to a head with leadership at the local and conference office. I was voted out of the SDA church, but not on the grounds of disagreement with the 27 fundamentals. I still held onto them,

although over the years I knew that Ellen White was not a true prophet, and that there were many problems with other Adventist teachings. I decided in my heart to serve God in any capacity to which He might call me. For several weeks after my ousting from Adventism I thought I would go to work for the county as I did in years previous to ministry. The Lord clearly indicated through a number of ways that I was to continue in gospel ministry. Now three years later we have a brand new church building with a wonderful sound system, rear view projector and special lighting for our once a month drama plays geared for the community. We are one of three churches in Oregon that have an interactive satellite system with two broadcasts per month that are geared for ministry training. As a congregation we are able to communicate with those on the screen either by phone or fax. Other ministers and church leaders have participated and are enjoying the programs.

We still hold services on Saturday. But it is a day of faith. In it we "Remember" that God is Creator and Redeemer. We don't attempt to keep it as a law. We keep it as a reminder of a relationship with God through faith. Saturday is a faith builder. We are invited by heaven to "live by faith." This is what the day means to us. In addition we also hold Sunday services. We started out with one member 14 month ago and today we have 35 adults and 14 children in attendance. On many occasions both the Saturday and Sunday families meet to fellowship. It is wonderful to see how faith in Jesus through the preaching of the gospel has torn down the walls of prejudice on both sides!

When I was going through a tough time of questioning the things I believed as an Adventist I was looking for someone that had gone through a similar experience. In a short time the Lord answered my prayer when Cultic Doctrine was sent to me. My wife and I took a week's vacation and went to Grand Canyon. I took only my Bible and Cultic Doctrine. What an eye opener! I refer to it as my Grand Canyon experience! I reexamined many SDA doctrines that week and came back home alive with joy in Christ. I never felt so free in my life!

I am not surprised at the harsh remarks that LAM gets from SDA's. The NT shows that it is the spirit of legalism. But I am extremely thankful for the many other positive responses from those who have found the peace in Christ that only He can give. Thank you Dale Ratzlaff and Colleen Tinker for your kind spirit in years past. The grace of Christ in you warms my heart. I hope to do the same for you one day.

*Agape,  
Tony Russo, pastor  
Blessed Hope Fellowship*

## Proclamation!

Publisher  
**Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.**

Editor  
**Dale Ratzlaff**

Designer  
**Richard Tinker**

**Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.**  
**Board of Directors**

Dale Ratzlaff, president, CFO  
Carolyn Ratzlaff, Secretary  
Bruce Heinrich  
Colleen Tinker  
Richard Tinker

© 2002 Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.  
PO Box 11587, Glendale, AZ 85318  
All rights reserved.

Phone: **623-572-9549**

Website:

**www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org**

E-mail: **dale@ratzlaf.com**

# Encountering the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus

## A study of Luke 24:13–35

Dale Ratzlaff

**You, too, may be at the point of your deepest need. The good news is that the Risen Christ—now through the Holy Spirit—will meet you there.**

**T**he literal bodily resurrection of Christ is the non-negotiable foundation upon which true Christianity is built. As we celebrate this greatest event in world history, we can expect the Risen Lord to meet us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit on our road in life just as he did those two sorrowing disciples on the road to Emmaus some 2,000 years ago. This passage of Scripture is rich with insights that can turn our sorrows and disappointments into joy—joy that must be shared!

“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them...”

These two disciples were in the pit of depression. Their hopes were dashed. Just days earlier Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem amid the acclaim of hundreds; excitement had run high. But now as the shadows lengthened along the dusty road their spirits were dark indeed. Jesus had been betrayed, tried, mocked, flogged, and crucified. They were confused by reports that some of the women had claimed to have seen a vision of angels and an empty tomb. Their whole lives were so entwined with His that the horror of these events shook them to the very core of their being. Unrecognized, Jesus joins these sorrowing, confused and discouraged disciples and began walking with them.

### **God meets us at the point of our deepest need.**

This is not an isolated teaching. Jacob was forced to leave home after deceiving his brother, Esau. Alone, without resources, he laid on the

ground with a stone for his pillow—and God met him there. So real was the encounter that the next morning Jacob declared, “Surely, this is the house of God.” Returning years later to his homeland he heard that his brother was coming with a small army to avenge him. Unarmed, with just his two wives, a few servants, and children, he again was in a most desperate situation—and God again met him there.

Perhaps some of us are at the point of a deep need. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some have had severe financial setbacks. Others, perhaps, are looking serious illness in the face. Still others have become estranged from family and friends; you, too, may be at the point of your deepest need. The good news is that the Risen Christ—now through the Holy Spirit—will meet you there.

“But,” you say, “why does He not come to my side when I am in need?”

“... but they were kept from recognizing him.”

### **God’s presence in our lives often goes unrecognized.**

The fact that we sometimes feel alone and helpless does not mean that God is not at our side. It may frequently be the case that at the time we feel most alone, is the very time God is close at our side. We live by faith not by sight, and must rest on the naked promise:

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you,” Jn. 14:18.

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked.

**Do you feel lukewarm and out of fellowship? This is the answer, the remedy. He is waiting for a personal invitation to bring salvation or to renew fellowship. Why not invite Him in?**

### **God wants us to share our deepest disappointments, hopes, doubts and joys.**

Let us, too, stand still for a moment and consider yet another discovery "What things?" He asks of us today. He is interested in what concerns us. As a friend, he wants to share our thoughts and concerns. Yes, it is O.K. to be honest with God, even with our doubts, even when we are discouraged. When we talk with God, we can tell it like it is!

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"

### **Partial belief is not enough**

Here is another discovery that will help us come to a place where we recognize God in our lives. Many believe Jesus was a good man, an ethical teacher with good values. Some even believe he is Michael the archangel. But in fact, Christ is the God/man who died for all sin, rose from the dead for our justification, and who is without beginning or end, Almighty God in human flesh. We must receive Him as He actually is, Savior, Lord, and God, truly trusting Him alone to save us from our sin. Otherwise, we, too, will be foolish and slow of heart, and will not enjoy true fellowship with God.

"Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

### **Our disappointment, our discouragement, and our doubts may be caused by a lack of understanding Bible truth.**

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our lack of insight may be because we have neglected to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

### **Christ is the central truth of the Bible and the key to unlocking its treasures.**

Like them we need divine help to see Christ in all the Scriptures because here we have the promise of the Holy Spirit.

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" Jn. 14:26. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" Jn. 16:13.

### **God wants our faith to be grounded in the Word**

Bible study serves a much greater purpose than just building a theological structure—as important as good theology is. In its purest form, Bible study is to lead us to the living Christ. Even the Risen Christ directed the minds of these disciples to the Scriptures for needed insight.

These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:31.

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over."

### **Jesus waits for a personal invitation!**

Do you feel alone? Have you invited Him in? Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. Rev. 3:20

Perhaps some of us have trusted our lives to Christ for salvation and somehow through the years that close fellowship has grown lukewarm or cold. Take courage, it was to the lukewarm church of the Laodiceans that Jesus gave this invitation. Invite Him in. Whether it is for the first time for salvation or now for renewed fellowship, just give the invitation. Do you feel lukewarm and out of fellowship? This is the answer, the remedy. He is waiting for a personal invitation to bring salvation or to renew fellowship. Why not invite Him in?

So He went in to stay with them.

### **If you invite Christ into your life, he will come in.**

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" Jn. 1:12. "He who believes has eternal life" Jn. 6:47. "Whoever con-

fesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" 1 Jn. 4:15.

The Christian life is meant to be a life of assurance, a life of abiding, and a life of fellowship with the Risen Christ!

When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight." They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

Yes, in the breaking of the bread at the Lord's Supper is where Jesus communes with us in a special way. By faith we recognize that He is present as we gather at the Lord's Table. This is the service that new covenant Christians are to "remember" until he comes (Lk. 21:19; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25).

### The presence of Jesus may warm our heart!

Today as we study the Scriptures with the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us, we too, may often recognize that our heart burns within us as

we commune with God in prayer and the study of his Word. This emotional experience is not the basis of our relationship; rather, it is the result of it.

### The resurrection of Christ is good news that must be shared!

In Bible times, traveling at night was dangerous. However, these previously discouraged disciples, now enlightened by the Risen Christ, had good news that had to be shared. They quickly retraced their steps back to the other disciples in Jerusalem and shared with them the exciting message that Christ Arose! A realization of the significance of the death and resurrection of Christ is the motor that drives Christian service. It is the fuel that ignites missionaries to go to the dark, dangerous recesses of the earth. It is good news that must be shared!

As we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, God wants to meet us on our road in life. He will come to us at the point of our deepest need. Even now, he may be at our side unrecognized. Share with him your deepest concerns. Accept him for who he is—the Almighty God. Go to the Scriptures yourself seeking Him and you will find him there. Ground your faith in the Bible and the Bible alone, and your heart will burn as you sense his presence. Invite him in and he will commune with you. Yes, you too, will find the fire that has burned in the hearts of true Christians and you, too, will find that you must share the good news—Christ arose! **!**

## Is there life after Adventism—for SDA pastors?



**Greg and Paula Taylor family**

since December. Paul and Rhonda wish to thank those on the email news group who were praying for them. Pray that God will richly bless their ministry as they are faithful to the gospel of Christ.

Yes, as you can see, there is life After Adventism—even for SDA pastors!

We have just received word from Pastor **Greg Taylor** that he has accepted a call to pastor in the Crossroads of Hagerstown Church in Maryland, about one half mile from the Review and Herald and 20 minutes from the General Conference office of SDAs. I understand that plans are already being made to start a Former Adventist Fellowship there. Greg and Paula would like to thank those who have supported them with their prayers and gifts during this transition time. Continue to pray for them that they will proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ in this new ministry.

**Paul Vogt** has just accepted a call to become pastor of the New Life Alliance Church in Whittier, California. He has been preaching there



**Paul and Rhonda Vogt**

# The Role of conscience in Christian freedom

DALE RATZLAFF

In the last issue of *Proclamation* we found five biblical principles that deal with conscience:

1. Our moral database may be deficient.
2. We should always follow our conscience.
3. When we follow our conscience thinking we are doing right, yet we end up doing the wrong thing because of an inadequately educated conscience, God overlooks our ignorance and will enlighten us.
4. Acting contrary to our conscience causes spiritual disaster.

**There is a strong felt need to persuade others to accept our understanding, whatever that understanding may be.**

5. Refusing to study and look at the facts can be as dangerous as going against our conscience, which can cause spiritual disaster.

The focus of this issue will be to discover how we are to relate to others who sincerely and honestly disagree on doctrinal and behavioral matters. For Formers these issues might include eating meat, eating unclean meat, drinking wine,<sup>1</sup> if or how one should observe the Sabbath, etc.

There is something within the human psyche that causes us to want others to agree with us. Perhaps subconsciously we need the affirmation that we are right. Whatever the reason, this desire to convince others seems to be present in most of us. This dynamic is seen when churches undergo theological or behavioral change. The people on the leading edge of change often feel frustrated with those who want to cling to the old ways and vice versa. This is an underlying cause at the root

of many church splits and comes into sharp focus when Christians disagree on matters which some feel to be a necessary component of faith. There is a strong felt need to persuade others to accept our understanding, *whatever* that understanding may be.

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul gives a number of principles that relate to freedom of conscience. While this chapter deals with food offered to idols, the principles brought out have direct application to Christians who honestly disagree over other matters of Christian behavior. Sometimes it is easier to grasp biblical principles that deal with controversial issues when the subject or illustration at hand is not the actual topic under discussion, as there is less personal prejudice and emotional involvement.

In New Testament times, pagan worship permeated all levels of Greek society. The pagans offered sacrifices to achieve the blessing of their gods. The meat offered on the pagan altars was usually divided into three portions. One portion was burned, the second was given to the priest, and the third to the worshiper who brought the sacrifice. Because many sacrifices were made, it was impossible for the priest to eat his entire portion. Therefore, the priest would take his meat and sell it at the local market.<sup>2</sup> In time enterprising priests incorporated restaurants or meat markets right into the pagan temples. People ate at Temple Restaurants because the food was good and/or they knew it had the blessing of their gods.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the Gentile pagans really believed in their idols. When they became Christians they renounced idol worship and refused to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. However, as they continued to progress in their Christian life, they began to realize that the pagan deities were little more than a figment of imagination. They realized that these gods of wood and stone were nothing but ridiculous nonsense! From this position of

enlightened knowledge they reasoned that offering meat to idols of wood and stone really did not affect it any way; therefore, there was nothing wrong with buying sacrificial meat or even eating at a Temple Restaurant. And their conclusions, as we will soon see, were correct from a knowledge perspective.

The problem came, however, when a new Christian saw Deacon Bill eating at Temple Restaurant. Having just accepted Christ and having renounced idolatry, the new Christian looked at Deacon Bill and reasoned, "If it is O.K. for Deacon Bill to eat at Temple Restaurant, then it is O.K. for me." However, for the new Christian, whose conscience database was still deficient, eating there was understood to be an act of worship to the pagan gods. All the memories of years of idol worship filled the mind of the new Christian and his conscience told him that eating at Temple Restaurant was wrong, because it was worshipping idols.

It is against this backdrop that Paul writes.

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies (1 Cor. 8:1).

In this verse Paul says there are two ways of dealing with problems of conscience. One is *the way of knowledge* and the other is *the way of love*. He tells us at the outset, which is correct.

Knowledge makes us arrogant but love edifies. Therefore, in solving Christian disagreements, we should follow the way of love, not the way of knowledge. While it is true that education in the Word of God, and the corresponding enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, is the long-term solution, the way of love should be followed until there is unity of conscience.<sup>4</sup>

If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know (1 Cor. 8:2).

In this verse Paul reinforces the truth we pointed out in the last chapter: our conscience database may be deficient. It is also of interest to realize that the person who thinks his knowledge is complete is often the very person who lacks knowledge. We must, therefore, be careful not to force others to reach our conclusions.

Paul is now going to give the logic of the way of knowledge, which is the long-term solution.

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there

are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

If this were all of Paul's instruction we would agree that it would be perfectly all right for any Christian to eat at Temple Restaurant. The pagan gods of wood and stone were nothing but ridiculous nonsense! Paul does not stop here, however. He goes on to show that:

...not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat (1 Cor. 8:7,8).

Paul shows that intrinsically there is nothing wrong with eating meat offered to gods of wood and stone. Relationship with God is not dependent upon what we eat or do not eat. In other words, the way of knowledge is the way of free-

**...the person who thinks his knowledge is complete is often the very person who lacks knowledge. We must, therefore, be careful not to force others to reach our conclusions.**

dom. How we use our freedom, however, must be limited when it might cause someone else to go against his/her conscience.

For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:10-12).

In this verse we find two more important principles regarding conscience. First, we should *never*

encourage others to go against their conscience, even if their conscience is wrongly educated and what we want them to do is right.

Second, when we use our Christian liberty in doing what is intrinsically right in a way that influences another Christian to do what he believes to be wrong, we not only cause the weaker brother to fall, but we sin against Christ. Because of these far reaching principles Paul concludes:

Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:13).

Note that the reason for Paul's cessation of eating meat was not because of any biblical or health mandate, but rather, it was because of the inadequately educated conscience of another. Here we see yet another principle of conscience. We should use the way of love and restrict our Christian freedom by not doing what would cause a weaker brother to violate his conscience, even though what we forego would not have been intrinsically wrong.

There is yet one more principle of conscience we should list. This is not clearly stated, but is definitely implied. Reeducating the conscience takes

## When we follow the way of love we have time for others to grow into the way of knowledge.

time. For some this time may be short, for others much longer. For some people, all they need is to be shown clearly the teaching of God's word relative to the question under consideration and they are ready to make any needed behavioral or doctrinal changes. For others this time may be much longer. Some have many years of engraved habit patterns of certain religious behaviors that were thought to be right, and for them the transitional time may be long and emotionally painful. Some have the necessary time to study and get to the bottom of a doctrinal or behavioral issue. Others have little time to study, so the time required to reeducate or complete their conscience database may be much longer. The ultimate answer is the way of knowledge combined with the way of love. This is why we have the wealth of instruction

in the epistles to young churches. But while a person is in the process of assimilating this knowledge, those dealing with him must follow the way of love. When we follow the way of love we have time for others to grow into the way of knowledge.

Must we then always restrict our legitimate Christian freedom when in the company of those who sincerely believe differently? No. Not when to do so would be to compromise the clarity of the gospel. In Galatians 2 Paul clearly demonstrates this principle. When the Judaizing Christians were spying out the liberty of Paul and Titus in regard to circumcision, Paul states "we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you."<sup>5</sup> Later on in the same chapter, Paul rehearsed how he had to confront Peter face to face.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14).

One could argue that Peter was following the way of love so as not to cause these men from the conservative law faction of the early church to go against their conscience. Yet because Peter's actions compromised the clarity of the Gospel, Paul confronted him face to face in public. Therefore, we have this principle: *We should not restrict our Christian freedom when to do so would clearly compromise the foundational principles of the gospel.*

### Principles of conscience applied to Sabbath controversy

Now let us consider the implications of these nine principles of conscience to questions of Sabbath behavior. Allow me to share a personal experience. Some years ago I led a group through a seven-month study of the Sabbath. We all, with the exception of perhaps one or two, reached the conclusion that the observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath was not required or expected of new covenant Christians. It took us



seven months of hard study to come to this conclusion. This, in itself, shows that it takes time to reeducate, or complete our conscience database. At the end of this time we intellectually knew what the Bible taught, but we then had to face how, or if, we were going to change our behavior relative to the Seventh-day Sabbath. Some were ready to make a clean break and start worshiping on Sunday. Others, while they intellectually wanted to make such a change, could not do so for emotional and relational reasons. They had many memory “tapes” that played in their minds—all the predictions of the dire consequences that would happen to those who left the Sabbath. Others had parents, children, or close friends who had not joined in our study, and who still felt the keeping of the Seventh-day Sabbath was to be the final test of loyalty to Christ in the last days. For these reasons, many were not ready to change their day of worship.

I remember the first time I went shopping on Saturday. The old tapes began to play. Had I really reached the right conclusion? When I went home I looked again at the evidence of Scripture and was convinced my conclusions were sound. I had to make a decision to follow the clear teaching of Scripture and not the tapes of years of “proof-text” indoctrination. Yes, the pages from the book of Galatians are well worn!

We all had kept the seventh-day Sabbath for years and it took different amounts of time for different people to make changes in their Sabbath behavior. Now, from the perspective of some eighteen years since that important seven-month study, and having reviewed the Biblical evidence on the subject numerous times, Scripture seems so clear that I wonder why it took me so long to see the light!

It seems to me that in congregations, or families for that matter, where a thorough, biblical study of the Sabbath leads to the conclusion that the Seventh-day Sabbath is no longer binding or expected of Christians, that great care should be followed in the transition. No one should be forced to go against his conscience. There is need for ongoing, thorough study and patience. While not neglecting the clear teachings of the word of God, the way of love should be followed until unity of conscience is achieved.

Another issue relative to Sabbath behavior comes into focus when those who have come to the conclusion that Seventh-day Sabbath observance is no longer required or intended for

Christians visit those who still believe that it is. How should they act? I think the answer is clear, not only from the principles of conscience outlined above, but also from the life of Paul. During their Sabbath observance we should, it seems to me, behave in the same way as those with whom we are staying. We must remember that their conscience is still bound by the old covenant Sabbath law that said:

...but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you (Ex. 20:10).

## **During their Sabbath observance we should, it seems to me, behave in the same way as those with whom we are staying.**

Therefore, if we use our Christian freedom and do something that they feel is a violation of Sabbath law, we cause them to violate their conscience because we are the “sojourner” who is staying with them. They feel under obligation to cause us, as their guests, to keep the Sabbath. For this reason, then, we ought to be careful to honor their conscience even if we have to restrict our Christian liberty. We should remember that worshiping God is appropriate on *any* day, including the seventh day. When we are with Sabbatarian friends or relatives there is nothing wrong with resting and worshipping alongside them. We do this, not from the basis of old covenant requirement, but as an expression of love, not wanting to make them sin against their conscience. This, I believe, is why Paul kept the Jewish feasts, underwent the temple purification rites, etc., when he met with the Jerusalem church. He did not want to cause them to violate their conscience (See Acts 18:18; 20:16; 21:26, 27).

Paul was clear in stating why he observed the Jewish ceremonies on some occasions and not on others. Here is his rationale:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Here Paul spells out his activities as he follows the way of love in seeking to spread the gospel to his fellow Jews. May we share our faith with the same love and submission!

## ...they should know we are Christians by our love!

I also believe it is appropriate to lead Sabbath keepers into biblical study or leave with them something which will help complete their conscience database. Like Paul we should use the way of love but we should also seek to bring them to a full understanding of the biblical teaching of the covenants, the Sabbath and the gospel. In doing so, however, they should know we are Christians by our love!

### Summary Principles

1. We should all recognize that our own conscience database may be deficient. This should lead us to continued personal Bible study, regular church attendance, and if possible, involvement in a small group Bible study where we can interact with other Christians who may help us see our own blind spots (1 Cor. 8:2).

2. We should always follow our conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3).

3. When we follow our conscience, wanting to do right and thinking we are doing right, but end up doing wrong, God treats us with grace and mercy and enlightens us (Acts 26:9-15; 1 Tim. 1:12,13; Jn. 7:17; Jn. 3:21).

4. Acting contrary to our conscience causes spiritual disaster (1 Tim. 1:18,19; 4:1,2; Tit. 1:15,16; Num. 22:2-35; 31:16).

5. Refusing to study and look at the facts can be as dangerous as going against our conscience, causing spiritual disaster (Acts 7:54-58; Matt. 13:15; Rom. 11:8; Jn. 9:20).

6. In solving Christian disagreements, we should use the way of love, not the way of knowledge. While it is true that education in the Word of God, and the corresponding enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, is the long term solution, the way of love should be followed until there is unity of conscience (1 Cor. 8:1).

7. We should never encourage others to go against their conscience, even if we know their conscience database is deficient (1 Cor. 8:7-11).

8. When we cause someone to go against his conscience we cause him to sin, and in so doing we sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:10-12).

9. We should restrict our own freedom rather than cause another to go against his conscience (1 Cor. 8:13).

10. Reeducating the conscience takes time. This is implied in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 where Paul gave instructions regarding the nonexistence of idols, (the way of knowledge) but he knew this would not solve the current situation. This principle is proven in Christian experience.

11. We should not restrict our Christian freedom when to do so would clearly compromise the foundational principles of the gospel. (Gal. 1:11-14)

12. Those who believe that the Seventh-day Sabbath is not required or intended for Christians should be willing to restrict their Christian freedom in order not to cause their sabbatarian relatives or friends to violate their conscience.

13. Christians who know that they are not under the old covenant Sabbath law should feel free to rest and worship alongside sabbatarians while in receipt of their hospitality, as an act of love.

14. Christians should lovingly seek to complete the conscience database of other Christians, but should follow the way of love until there is unity of conscience.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Scripture is clear that we should not get drunk with wine.

<sup>2</sup>The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, Vol. 10, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>New Testament Commentary, Simon J. Kistemaker, 1 Corinthians, p. 273, 274.

<sup>4</sup>Here I am not saying that we ever leave the way of love, but that within the way of love the long-term solution includes knowledge from the Word of God and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>Gal. 2:5.

## Transitioning to the New Covenant CONTINUED FROM FRONT

covenant, which was a law-based covenant given at Sinai for the people of Israel.

For Jews who became Christians a transition was necessary. The change was not easy, even though it was for the better. Some jumped right into the new covenant. Others hung on tenaciously to the old. Some tried to blend the two. Discussions raged over how much of the old was still binding in the Christian era. Some of those debates are still going on nearly 2000 years later!

A classic example of just how challenging this transition was is found in Galatians 2:1–5. The apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians to churches that he had earlier established, encouraging them to stay loyal to the true gospel—the only gospel. False teachers were bringing confusion, teaching a Christ-plus-something gospel. The so-called Judaizers gained a hearing by attacking the messenger, Paul. They said that he was not an official apostle, that he had gotten his message from Jerusalem, but was watering it down and not telling the whole thing. They insisted that the new converts needed the whole message from Jerusalem. They needed Christ plus the law.

given him a new name—“Son of Encouragement.” Barnabas had been one of the early supporters of Paul after his conversion (see Acts 9:26,27; 11:22–25). It was natural for Paul and Barnabas to go together to Jerusalem. But Titus was a different story. It was Paul’s idea to take Titus along too (Gal. 2:1). Titus was a Gentile. That meant he would be a controversial traveling partner. He would not be allowed in the Jewish synagogues or the temple in Jerusalem because he was uncircumcised.

Titus apparently was one of Paul’s converts. He became a fellow minister, missionary and close companion of Paul’s. Paul wrote one of the New Testament letters to him. Maybe Paul brought Titus as a trophy of grace and a test case. As a trophy he would provide evidence of the genuine conversion and life transformation that was happening among the Gentiles. As a test case he would provide opportunity for the attitude of the believers in Jerusalem to be displayed.

When Paul arrived, he set before the leaders “the gospel” that he “preached among the Gentiles.” What was that gospel? It was the simple message of salvation by grace alone, received through faith alone, because of Christ’s finished atonement

For Jews who became Christians a transition was necessary. The change was not easy, even though it was for the better. Some jumped right into the new covenant. Others hung on tenaciously to the old. Some tried to blend the two.

In the first chapter of Galatians, Paul asserts that his gospel was completely independent from the church in Jerusalem. It was given to him directly from God. He never even visited Jerusalem until three years after his conversion and then it was just a brief visit to meet Peter and James.

In chapter two, Paul goes on to show that although he received his gospel independently from the Jerusalem church, nevertheless it was an identical gospel to theirs, and his message was recognized and affirmed by the church leaders who endorsed his ministry.

“...I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain” (Gal. 2:1-2).

Barnabas was a respected Jewish Christian leader. He must have been a great guy to be around. In fact, his friends had

alone. It was a gospel of free grace, totally independent from human works. It was a gospel which did not require conformity to the law and customs of the Jews—but simple faith in Christ (*cf.* Gal. 2:16–21).

The text says that Paul met privately with the leaders in Jerusalem “for fear that he had run the race in vain” (v. 2). At first glance it looks like Paul was a bit insecure and worried, maybe wondering if he was preaching the right thing, as though he had doubts in his mind from his old habits of thought, and needed to be reassured by the church pillars. Some people read it that way.

I do not, because this statement comes right after chapter one where Paul confidently established that his gospel came through divine revelation. It was not from any men, but from Jesus, and no one could change it—not even an angel from heaven (1:8)! I think what Paul is saying here is that he did not want all of his investment for the sake of the gospel to be in

vain. He did not want his work and preaching to be undermined by lack of support from Jerusalem. So he met privately with the leaders to make sure they were on the same page and backing each other up.

Now notice what happens in the next verses:

“Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. [This matter arose] because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you” (Gal 2:3–5).

If Paul brought Titus along as a test case, he ended up being just that! Paul must have insisted that Titus be accepted as an equal believer just as he was—not after he conformed to the law. Circumcision was the entry sign into the Old Covenant. Circumcision itself was not the only issue. It was a symbol of conformity to the Law of Moses, the entire old covenant package delivered to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. By bringing Titus along and insisting that he remain as he was, Paul was saying in essence: “Deal with it! We’re living in the new covenant now. So let’s live like it and move away from mandating old covenant practices.”

I don’t think that Paul tried to pick a fight. It seems that he mainly wanted to speak with the leaders privately. But legalists can be very aggressive with their agenda and their insistence on imposing their way on everyone else. Some “false brothers... infiltrated our ranks to spy,” Paul says. Maybe that means they found out about the meetings Paul was having and crashed the party. The language suggests that they kind of snuck in acting like they were supporters, but they had a hidden agenda which didn’t stay hidden for long.

They wanted to “spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.” Please do not miss the beautiful phrase in the middle of that sentence—“*the freedom we have in Christ Jesus.*” That is the theme of Galatians and the heart of the gospel. When you hide your life in Christ and rest secure in Him and Him alone you have freedom. It is ever and only in Christ Jesus. It is a wonderful freedom. Not freedom to go out and sin and live according to the flesh and be irresponsible. But freedom from bondage to sin, freedom from guilt, freedom from condemnation—and more than that—freedom from the law, freedom from an obsession with lists, and regulations, and rules, and do’s and don’ts.

Galatians 5:18 says, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” The Spirit leads you, not the law. He writes the principles of God’s law on your heart. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” There is awesome freedom in letting the Spirit lead and guide you through His Word and through the inner compass of your conscience.

In Galatians 2:4 Paul says that the false brothers were spying on the freedom they had in Christ and trying to make them slaves. We need to realize as Christians that it is not the responsibility of believers to spy on other believers! We each need to

follow the Lord the way we are led and not worry about how God is leading someone else to express his or her freedom. If you are not sure about that please read Romans 14. Legalists seem to worry more about other people than themselves.

These guys were trying “to make us slaves” Paul says. Slaves to what? Slaves to the law; slaves to a Christ-plus-something gospel. That’s why they were demanding that Titus be circumcised. Freedom is a precious thing. No one should have to go back into slavery after having tasted freedom. Watch how Paul responded:

“We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you” (Gal. 2:5).

Paul was determined that whenever “the truth of the gospel” was at stake, he was ready to stand up for it! He says “we did not give in to them for a moment.” Does the fact that Paul talks like that mean that he was a bullheaded, argumentative guy who had to have his own way on everything? No, not at all!

Paul took a totally different approach with weak brothers and false brothers. These were “false brothers” (v.4). Paul also took a totally different approach when dealing with different opinions versus different gospels. Whenever someone started making a salvation issue out of anything and adding it to the gospel of grace, Paul immediately identified it as heresy and confronted it aggressively.

Let me show you how differently Paul could relate to the same issue depending on whether it related to weak or false brothers, and depending on whether it was a matter of different opinions or different gospels. Let’s take the three main Jewish boundary marker issues: circumcision, food laws, and holy days.

## Circumcision

Sometime after the Jerusalem Council, after it had been clearly decided that circumcision was not a salvation issue and was not required of the Gentile converts, Paul nevertheless encouraged Timothy to be circumcised.

“Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3).

Why did Paul do this? Timothy was half Jew. Apparently he had great potential to reach out effectively to Jews with the gospel. But he would have to be able to enter their synagogues and be accepted by them before he could lead them to Christ. So Paul did it “because of the Jews.” It was not a salvation issue here. It was a concession to weakness and for strategic ministry purposes.

But back in Jerusalem earlier with Titus, who was a full blooded Gentile with no potential or calling to a Jewish evangelistic mission, and with the Judaizers trying to make a salvation issue out of it, Paul “did not give in for one minute!”

## Food Laws

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul encouraged believers to limit their freedom if necessary because of weak believers:

“So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one... But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Cor. 8:4, 7–9).

“Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.’ If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacri-

### **Holy Days**

By holy days I mean the Jewish holy days listed in Leviticus 23, which included the weekly Sabbath, monthly new moons, and annual festivals. Listen to Paul’s advice concerning Jewish holy days in the following two passages:

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col 2:16,17).

“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters... One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike.

Notice that Paul does not say “don’t judge” or “let each of you be fully convinced in your own mind.” Instead he says, “I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.” Wow! Such strong language! Why? Because the Judaizers had made the observance of Jewish holy days a salvation issue.

fice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience?” (1 Cor. 10:25–29).

Here Paul encourages believers to place certain limits on their liberty if a weak believer may be confused or discouraged by the exercise of freedom in some area. This is not a salvation issue and some people have different opinions, so respect that.

Now notice how different his tone is about food rules in another setting:

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:1–4).

Apparently these teachers were mandating that certain foods were not to be eaten—making this a salvation issue. Paul reacts completely differently. Instead of encouraging the believers to limit their liberty for the sake of those who hold these views, he calls their beliefs “things taught by demons.”

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God” (Rom. 14:1,5,6).

Paul clearly says in these verses, “Don’t judge!” These verses were written regarding the weak and those who had different opinions but were not making salvation issues out of it.

Now notice the difference in tone on the same subject:

“You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you” (Gal. 4:10–11).

Notice that Paul does not say “don’t judge” or “let each of you be fully convinced in your own mind.” Instead he says, “I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.” Wow! Such strong language! Why? Because the Judaizers had made the observance of Jewish holy days a salvation issue.

Back in Galatians 2:5 Paul says, regarding the legalists insistence that Titus be circumcised:

“We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you” (Gal. 2:5).

Does it make sense to you why Paul takes the approach he does here? The issue was “the truth of the gospel.” Whenever the truth of the gospel is at stake because of false teachers or legalistic beliefs it must be uncompromisingly defended.

It may be beneficial for us to pause here and raise the question: *Why was it so hard for many of the Jewish Christians to make the transition to the new covenant?*

The answer is complex because people are complex. Many issues combined to make change difficult. No doubt many contributing factors were all wrapped up together: cultural, social, behavioral, psychological, theological and carnal.

Think about each one of these issues and how they impact change:

**Cultural issues.** When people grow up a certain way they find security in the way they have always done things. They like knowing the rules, the boundaries, and doing the traditions. We are creatures of habit. That makes change hard.

**Social issues.** If you have family, friends, work associates or schoolmates who are putting pressure on you to conform to the old way it is hard to resist. If you do not conform, it usually affects those relationships negatively and that is uncomfortable.

**Behavioral issues.** Humans tend naturally to resist change and hang on to the familiar—some more than others. We all have different personality styles. Behavioral scientists have noted that within the general population there is a bell curve.

- 2% are innovative leaders—they like to take risks and are able to change quickly
- 14% are opinion leaders—they are pioneer types, early adopters
- 34% are the early majority—they are willing to change after the opinion leaders do
- 34% are the late majority—they are hesitant and skeptical and cautious, accepting change only after the early majority does
- 16% are the last adopters—they are traditional, resistant, suspicious and focused on the past

So, behaviorally speaking, some people are always going to be more resistant than others to change, at least at first.

**Psychological issues.** Psychologists study the way the mind works and they often disagree. But most all theorists agree concerning something called “cognitive consistency.”

“Cognitive consistency is a technical term used to describe the tendency within almost all of us to keep our attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions consistent.”<sup>1</sup>

If we feel that our beliefs are being significantly challenged or changed it throws us out of balance into an inconsistent state of mind called “cognitive dissonance.”

The theory of cognitive consistency holds that:

“...change produces psychological tension which we seek to reduce by either distorting the new message or by changing some other part of the system. This response is motivated by our strong desire to regain a state of consistency.”<sup>2</sup>

Our desire for cognitive consistency also explains the phenomenon of “selective perception.” People will often avoid or ignore

new information if it causes cognitive dissonance. They prefer to only hear things that complement what they already believe.

“It is commonly recognized that people tend to avoid messages which contradict their views... the reason for this is that contrary messages tend to arouse the tension which stems from inconsistency. Since the easiest way to deal with this tension is to prevent it from arising in the first place, people commonly listen only to those with whom they already agree. In this way a comfortable balance can be maintained. There are few postulates of modern psychology which are as widely accepted and as solidly based as this assertion: people desire mental consistency and strive to maintain it, often at the expense of the truth.”<sup>3</sup>

So there are some definite psychological issues that make a radical transition—like moving from the old covenant to the new—very difficult.

**Theological issues.** When a group of people are convinced that they are the people of God and believe that they can back it up with Scripture, they tend to develop an “us-versus-them” mentality. They are the “chosen ones,” the “remnant,” the “apple of God’s eye,” the “ones on the path of light,” the “right ship that will go through the storm to the very end,” etc. Everyone else is on the outside. Security comes from an easily recognizable set of boundaries—a detailed package of doable stuff that defines who is on the inside and who is on the outside. It becomes impossible to imagine anyone being saved if they do not come onboard with the so-called remnant group.

**Carnal issues.** Carnal means *of the flesh or sinful*. All of us have a natural, sinful, internal pull toward selfishness and pride. Legalism, like all false religion, appeals to the flesh because it is a human-centered approach motivated by human pride and resting on human achievement. Since much of the Jewish system had degenerated into legalism, there were carnal issues inhibiting the grace awakening as well.

Why was it so hard for many of the Jewish Christians to make the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant? It’s a complex answer. There were cultural, social, behavioral, psychological, theological and carnal issues all wrapped up together.

That was true for the Jewish Christians in first century Jerusalem, and it is true for some today as well. But when false teachers tried to pull believers back into bondage Paul was adamant about the gospel of grace:

“We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.” (Gal. 2:5)

Whenever legalists try to add to the gospel or impose their way on others we should kindly, yet firmly respond like Paul. Many of us have struggled to one degree or another with a painful transition from legalism to grace. Once we understand and embrace the gospel, we do well to stand for it, defend it, and cherish the precious freedom we have in Christ Jesus!

<sup>1</sup> Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking*, Baker Books, 1992, p. 57

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

# Conquering the Giant

ERMA B MORGAN TOUSSAINT

**To the best of my ability I lived up to the church standards and adhered to the doctrines, always trying to do better.**

**T**his is my testimony of my journey to becoming a woman of Grace. The journey has not been easy, but it is wonderful to experience freedom in Christ and to know He accepts me fully—warts, hang-ups, and all!

My parents were sound, moral people who brought us children up to live right. I was born and raised in the West Indies on the island of Grenada. The community was close-knit, like blood relations, and people cared deeply about one another. We had freedom to go to the village Methodist church whenever we wanted to go, and I knew I needed Christ in my life.

I recognized my lack of Bible teaching and so responded and accepted the powerful, dynamic presentation of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines which appealed to me: an honest-hearted, pliable, obedient seeker of true Bible knowledge. When I was in my late teens, in 1973, my heart was stirred by the Holy Spirit to receive my Lord as my Savior. I remember the joy that flooded my soul as I can personally say, heaven came down to me. At that time I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist church.

I sought the Lord. I went to an Adventist college. I majored in religious education and prepared to teach. I never wavered in my zeal to know Christ personally and to spread His Word as I had been taught. I served in many capacities at my local church from youth leader to deaconess, and I even worked at the conference/mission office for a short period.

I read, studied, and used Ellen G. White's Spirit of Prophecy books as a guide for every area in my life. I used *The Conflict of the Ages Series* and *The Morning Watch* commentaries for my private devotions, *Messages to Young People* for teenage counsel, *The Adventist Home* as a marriage manual, *Child Guidance* for a child-rearing reference, and *Counsels on Diet and Foods* to justify and

defend my vegetarianism. Other books such as *Education, Evangelism, and Colporteur Ministry* have been among my favorites, too.

## Life in Disarray

To the best of my ability I lived up to the church standards and adhered to the doctrines, always trying to do better. All I wanted to do was to live an upright, godly life regardless of what went on within or without the church or denomination.

Yet my life was constantly in disarray; I had no peace in my soul. As the years passed, the level of cognitive dissonance increased. I was confused. I picked up some subtle but strong messages; sometimes they were spoken, but more often they were not. For example: to be saved eventually, a person has to understand the doctrinal facts of Adventism correctly; growing in Christ meant knowing and explaining the prophecies; we were never to question or require accountability from leadership—they were hierarchy; non-Sabbath keepers who have heard the Adventist teachings should join the church and keep Sabbath, or they'll be lost; be aloof and separate from other denominations except to give them "the third angel's message."

As long as I read, studied, and followed the Spirit of Prophecy counsel, my life was going nowhere. I felt more and more frustrated by never being able to measure up to the standards and by obsessing about my shortcomings.

I knew many wonderful, sacrificial, hard-working, zealous, conscientious Adventists, but they all seemed to lack spiritual maturity and an understanding of GRACE. They tried to sound excited, but I could sense their struggle as they "hoped to make it." As seasoned (old) as they were, they displayed a critical, judgmental spirit. Few demonstrated any inner joy or peace.

**In the fall of 1998 I attended an Episcopal Church retreat. I was amazed at the clarity with which the members expressed their relationship with Christ.**

### **Truth and Lesser Light**

I had been taught that we Adventists had all the “truth” because God gave the church the Spirit of Prophecy—Ellen G. White. Therefore, for years, I was extremely cautious and afraid to listen to or read anything that came from anyone but an authorized Adventist.

But if we had all the “Truth” and EGW was always right, didn’t that make us infallible? Didn’t the Roman Catholic Church (Babylon, we Adventists called it) make the same claim about themselves and the pope?

I was taught the Roman Catholic Church teaches extra-scriptural doctrines. Proudly, I boasted about Adventists being “sola scriptura.” But no conscientious Adventist, I realized, would deny that EGW’s writings are the main source of study references—even more than the Bible.

If I had said that I didn’t care for the Spirit of Prophecy or Ellen White, I would have been deemed blasphemous. I had one question: why does a person need the lesser light (Ellen White) when they have the greater light—the Bible?

We claimed to proclaim “God’s Last Day Message.” If Jesus were here today, I believed, He would certainly attend an Adventist church on Sabbath. I felt pride at being among the spiritual elite. We condemned other denominations as “law breakers” and “second class Christians.” We even mocked and dismissed them as having cheap grace and “Jesus only,” while Adventists have the “Meat of the Word”—the Investigative Judgment (the concepts of which keep the vast majority of the members in fear), diet, and the law.

Yet in spite of having the “Truth,” most of us Adventists suffered with an insecurity complex.

### **Of Doctrines and Coldness**

I had an unhealthy obsession with Sabbath. This subject overshadowed almost everything else, especially Christ and the life-changing reality I should have experienced. I hardly ever heard the Holy Spirit mentioned; it seemed to be a foreigner in church. We talked and sang about the Spirit and the Christ-centered life, but the focus for most of us was Sabbath and the impending doom of the National Sunday Law. Sabbath was, I believed, the Seal of God.

What did it mean, I sometimes wondered, when scripture says God anointed us and set His seal of ownership on us and put His Spirit into our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come? Also, if we make a thing or day more

important than the Creator and the Holy Spirit, is this not idolatry?

Some have observed that coldness and harshness is indigenous to Adventist congregations. I haven’t been everywhere, but I have lived both inside and outside the United States, and I agree. Something is wrong when constant schisms, bitter strife, and political manhandling designed to keep power in the ranks of the hierarchy characterize a Christian organization.

### **Years of Fear—and Release**

Fear and defensiveness characterized my almost 26 years as an Adventist. The fear was like a prison that boxed me in. I felt that as long as I attended church and participated politely and quietly, I was assumed to be okay. I became tired with the political maneuverings and fights about issues that really did not matter to the heart of God. My fears were like giants in my life that I had to struggle with constantly. These were the fears of being rejected, of not measuring up, and of losing my salvation. I even feared being judged and condemned if I were to be open about my struggle to know whether God loved me personally. I masked these fears by appearing belligerent and outspoken. I wore a tough veneer, all the while crying out from inside, “God, please love and accept me! I want to be good! I want to know You. I want to love you. If You are in control, why is my life such a mess? Why is the church such a mess?”

In the fall of 1998 I attended an Episcopal Church retreat. I was amazed at the clarity with which the members expressed their relationship with Christ.

An Episcopal church? No way!

Yet I sensed the Holy Spirit begin stirring within me then. I was at the end of my rope, and I felt like I was drowning when a furious storm from hell hit my local church. God somehow used that diabolical fiasco in my church to break my fear of leaving Adventism. In September, 1998, at a local church board meeting, I watched a conference official wield arrogance, intimidation, shame, and control as weapons against the church members. The cold, harsh attitude and schemes that prevailed that night repelled me.

As the storm raged in my church, God showed me that my fear could be used to honor Him. My fear is no longer a chain around my neck; it became courage to conquer the giant.



I finally realized I could leave the Adventist church. God has affirmed me. I know I have been facing many giants—criticism, advice, disapproval from friends—yet I can walk confidently in the Spirit. God is supplying my needs for affirmation, appreciation, encouragement, and more.

### Christ My Focus

Now Christ is the focus of my attention. I have begun to understand, experience, and witness what being kind, forgiving, gentle, patient and unconditionally loving looks like in the Body of Christ. These things are in bold contrast to the insecurity and fear of losing my salvation that I lived with as an Adventist.

Ironically, my critics are those who've been my friends. Many of them know and admit the blatant, ungodly administrative practices in the church. They experience confusion, unease and emptiness in their Christian walk. Yet they prefer to live in denial than to examine the errors and contradictions of EGW with scripture. Others cling to the church, believing it is their responsibility to change things with their influence. A few are afraid of losing their cherished jobs.

These people are the same ones who encouraged prospective members to trust God if they lost family or jobs over the Sabbath issue.

My assurance of salvation has given me a joy and peace I NEVER had before. It has brought me into a closer walk with Christ. I can say, "I AM SAVED!" I am awed and amazed that He cares about me in a deep, personal way. For the past two years I have seen God's transforming power surge through my whole family. Our spirits have come alive.

God has pursued me over the years, trying to show and teach me His ways. He is the Rock of my salvation. I can now say with deep conviction, I am uninterested in being a Seventh-day Adventist. I cannot return to spiritual mediocrity.

I am walking in the Spirit who seals us in Faith Alone, by Grace Alone, with Christ Alone. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

*I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you; Oh, my soul, Rejoice!*

Hallelujah!

"You are God's workmanship, created for good works which God prepared for you in advance." Ephesians 2:10



## Former Adventist Fellowship Focuses on Bible Study

When people leave Adventism, one of their greatest needs is the need for genuine Bible study. At Former Adventist Fellowship in Redlands, California, we structure our weekly meeting around in-depth study of whole books of the Bible.

At least two facts underlie the group's commitment to Bible study. The first is that most of us never studied the Bible inductively as Adventists. When we leave, we don't really know what the Bible teaches. The second reason is that the Bible is the only dependable source of truth. Having learned the Bible in a system that misused scripture and used extra-biblical sources to support spurious doctrines, we are vulnerable to spiritual deception. We have to immerse ourselves in the scriptures, praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, in order to protect ourselves against new heresies.

You can participate in the FAF Bible studies by logging onto the website [ForemerAdventist.com](http://ForemerAdventist.com), and clicking on "Studies". You can also read the stories of some who have found freedom in Jesus, or you can join the discussion on the live forum. [www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com)

### Impossible to reconcile with Biblical Christianity

My wife and I had thought of moving back to the states but God called us back into ministry and missions in \_\_\_\_\_. I had just ordered and read *A Theologians Journey* when we were in \_\_\_\_\_. I gave away all material I had from you while I was there, thinking I would have no other use for it. It's been very hard for me, as I know you understand. I really couldn't handle being in \_\_\_\_\_ even though I have family there. I have gone through periods where I think SDA's are Christian, Cult, OK, to, I don't know—but one thing I am positive of is that the doctrine of the SDA's is cultic. Having studied theology for several years now *outside* the SDA system has made it easier to see where the beliefs of the [SDA] Church are just impossible to reconcile with Biblical Christianity...

### Struggled for years under false teachings

Thank you for your hard work and ministry. I am thankful that God has given you a heart to redirect the misled! It has been a hard journey for you I am sure. But the strength Christ has given you translates to all of us who have struggled for years under false teachings. May God continue to bless you.

### Doesn't see the true meaning

I am grateful for the advice on reading material for my husband. Now what do you suggest if he has already been given reading material and all he does is pick it apart and doesn't see the true meaning. I am really at a point of leaving him because this has caused such a distance between us and has even hindered my spiritual life. If you know of any way to reach someone who is so tied to this belief that they don't care if it is hurting the ones that they say they love most, I would be greatly in need of knowing how to reach him. This has been going on for \_\_\_\_\_ years now, and progressively getting worse.

### Your magazines have really made us study the Bible

We so enjoy your magazines and would like to add another name to your mailing list. Your magazines have really made us study the Bible instead of just going to someone else's classes have having only their belief. Thank you so much for helping to open our eyes to so many new Biblical truths.

### After hearing Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi speak...

Dr. Ratzlaff, I want to thank you for being a great help in showing me the error of the Seventh Day Sabbath in Christianity. I have been in the Church since May 1995 and a baptized member since July 1997. This past Saturday after hearing Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi speak I sent a letter (enclosed) to my pastor asking for my name to be removed from the rolls. I also sent copies to five other families who were my closest friends (whether they will remain that way remains to be seen). Even though I felt at times that the Sabbath was burdensome, without scriptural authority I would have never left it. The liberty I am experiencing is helping me to see God in a more loving way than as a strict task master. It has been pounded into my head time and time again "doctrine, doctrine" and now I am learning "relationship, relationship." Please pray for me "a recovering SDA." May God continue to bless you and your work! I will be sending some funds for the furtherance of your ministry.

### "Deplore" your scholarship

I admire your "Zeal" but "Deplore" your scholarship. Please remove our names from your mailing list.

### Well-rehearsed pat answers for those particular questions

I've been an SDA since \_\_\_\_\_, when I was baptized on \_\_\_\_\_. My struggle with some doctrines began in 1985 while I was undertaking a teaching diploma at \_\_\_\_\_ Adventist College... prior to teaching in denominational high schools in \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_. Naturally, I have had some bitter arguments with Church leaders, mainly over the Sabbath issue, but in my opinion no one has successfully refuted the anti-Sabbath arguments. I was interested to read in some material on your website (I think) that SDA theologians tend to argue by character assassination rather than producing constructive and logical theological debate. That has been my experience also. They attempt to put words in one's mouth and then counter attack what one has not actually said. This would stem from their insecurity. I believe they want to hear certain questions, and then imagine they have actually heard them, simply because they have well-rehearsed pat answers for those particular questions. An extremely irritating and dishonest practice! The whole busi-

ness has been very stressful. I finally resigned from denominational employment in \_\_\_\_\_ but not officially on doctrinal grounds. It happened while I was lecturing at \_\_\_\_\_ Adventist University and resulted from administrative deception and lies concerning my terms of employment. What I find even more painful than coming to grips with doctrinal issues and contemplating quitting the denomination, as well as arguing with church administrators, is the family stress it causes... I wish your ministry many victories for the LORD. Happy New Year!

### Helped me to put Adventism behind me

I have received the two books I ordered before Christmas and have read both, in fact *A Theologian's Journey* I have read twice. Both are very interesting books indeed and have helped me to put Adventism behind me, how quickly or where I shall go from here is uncertain at this point, but there isn't any doubt that I have made drastic changes in my religious thinking. I take this opportunity to wish you a happy new year and may God bless you in your continued work.

### What a wonderful ministry

I am not sure how I got on your mailing list, but I am enjoying your *Proclamation* magazine! I have felt the same as the views expressed for many years, although I am still an active SDA. I guess I've had a difficult time throwing out the baby with the bath water. Anyway, I have told a couple of my friends about the *Proclamation* and they would like to be on your list also. Their names and address are listed below. Thank you for caring enough to reach out to the sad, discouraged souls who wonder where they fit into the scheme of things once they leave the SDA church. What a wonderful ministry you all are doing!

### I am in a struggle with the SDA doctrines

Thank you for sending me *Proclamation*. God bless you. I am in a struggle with the SDA doctrines. I want to leave but when I sent in my request to have my name taken off the clerk's role, the pastor refused. He came by and tried to discredit your books. I don't believe all he said. I'm all alone—wish I could find others to talk with.

**I have never had a problem with the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Dear Sir, I am enclosing the address form from the magazine that we have received. Please remove our name from your mailing list. I am a retired SDA minister, Conference Administrator, Academy Principal and love the Lord with all my heart and I hope it shows in all my relationship with people and students that I have worked with in the past and present. As far as I am concerned I have never had a problem with the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I have always emphasized the relationship that one must have with the Lord. Each morning when I had morning chapel with my students at three different academies I emphasized it would be a beautiful day if you started that morning with the Lord. Relationship is the key. Too bad many folk who have left the church have never developed a relationship with the Lord, but looked only at the rules and regulations and restrictions that they felt they had rather than a relationship with One whom they should have loved! Thank you for removing our name from your list.

**An answer to prayer**

Thanks so much for allowing God to lead in this ministry. The material I've gotten from this ministry has helped and has been an answer to prayer. About a year and a half ago, I started praying that God would teach me His truths and—praise Him—He did and still is!...

**Keep proclaiming His gospel**

I am so blessed to receive your *Proclamation* magazine. It is the only one that I read cover to cover, as it is full of God's truth to a world that contains so many false doctrines. I was raised a Catholic so I know first hand about the workings of a false religious system. Now I know Jesus as my Lord and Savior...so I am no longer part of a religious organization but a member of the true body of Christ, His true Church. Working in a SDA hospital in \_\_\_ I see first hand the good works that are done to extend the "healing ministry of Christ," but at the same time I see so much of the false teaching they promote with their literature, seminars and TV/radio programs. God is using you, brother, and I just want to encourage you with my donation and prayers. Jesus is the light and the law is just a shadow. Keep proclaiming

His gospel so the lost will see Jesus as their rest and not a day of the week.

**An Advent Christian [not SDA] in "transition."**

Dear People, I love your timely newsletter—very informative! I am an Advent Christian [not SDA] in "transition." We were the first denomination to proclaim the "Billy" [William] Miller as our founder, as the Seventh-day Adventist came a bit later...I still believe in conditional immortality and soul sleep but never believed in the Investigative Judgment, or the Cleansing of the Sanctuary...I have an open, but not empty mind.

**This makes me scared**

Dear Dale, I like what you say, but I got scared from Verle Streifling. He seems to say that all spirits are going to live forever. This makes me scared if they are in eternal torture—hell.

**Stop bitching**

I think you should get off the Adventist Church kick and just teach the truth. It's been long enough that you should be able to stop bitching, don't you think? I'd like to kick them too but that's my problem not theirs.

**You have special needs!**

I believe you have special needs! I will pray for your thinking to clear up.

**Concern for former SDA's like myself**

Enclosed is a donation check in the name of LAM, Inc. Thank you for your dedicated ministry and continued concern for former SDA's like myself. May God continue to bless your efforts to focus on our Lord and Savior, Jesus. I and my wife \_\_\_, are still members of \_\_\_ in \_\_\_, having recently moved to the new address in \_\_\_. Pray for us that we will find an active Evangelical Christian congregation in our area to link up with — or at least the possibility of developing a small group(s) ministry with the potential of congregational growth. Continuing to pray for our Lord's return.

**Add me to your news group**

Pastor Ratzlaff, I've been an Adventist for five years and am just now actually studying the Bible for myself rather than filling in the blanks on the study guide. God is definitely leading my husband and I toward Truth! I no longer believe that

EGW was a prophet and I don't even think the term "spirit of prophecy" in Rev. 19:10 refers to a human prophet. We've only been studying this stuff for about a week and I'd love to get as much info as I can get my hands on! Please, add me to your news group! Thank you for your ministry!

**If the Son has set you free, you are FREE INDEED!**

Please add me to the news group. Blessings on your continued work with the most "wounded" group of people I know....former Adventists! If the Son has set you free, you are FREE INDEED!

**Satan's instrument**

Please do not send any of your publications to us! We did not order *Proclamation!* It is Satan's instrument and we don't want it.

**Is Sunday acceptable?**

Dale, I officially left the SDA church 10 years ago with the discovery of Walter Rae's book *The White Lie*. I was already seriously questioning the investigative judgement, a doctrine that only the SDA denomination seems to get and which can only be supported with the writings of [Ellen] White. Now it is 10 years later and I've been without a church home for a very long time. I am starting to look back into the Sabbath issue, not for any desire to join a false prophet, but to see if it is still the Biblical day of worship chosen by God. It seems to me that the argument is strong and in fact, the history of the Catholic church documents moving the day to Sunday and associating it with worship of the Sun God. I am a former Adventist that will not go back and I appreciate your ministry and pointing out the falasies of Ellen White, but are you convinced that it is perfectly acceptable to worship on Sunday in light of the way in which the day was changed? It seems that you take the position that the Sabbath is not God's chosen day of worship any longer (that God does prefer Sunday). I have ordered your book *Sabbath in Crisis* in hope that you shed some light on the subject.

**Mail letters and donations to:**

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

## After Adventism...

# What a life!

Walter & Kaety Friedrich

***Christ is now  
more than  
ever part of  
our lives and  
has touched  
us in ways we  
wouldn't  
imagine.***

**M**y wife and I were raised Seventh-Day Adventists and always believed it to be a truth seeking church. While unsatisfied with a superficial understanding of our doctrines, I looked for literature that would help me deepen my understanding of the church beliefs. I was happy to find the book *1844 Made Simple* by Clifford Goldstein. While reading this book, I couldn't agree with a number of conclusions about the little horn of Daniel 8 and its relation to Daniel 7. After searching further on both SDA and non-SDA literature, I was confronted with too many issues with the 1844 doctrine, and as Clifford Goldstein states in his book: "Either 1844 is true and we have the truth, or it's false and we have inherited and peddled lies." Talking to several people, I was led to further study the history of our church and the 1980 crisis, which had addressed this and other issues. The statements made by EGW about the doctrine of the sanctuary and the events around 1844 seemed contradictory with Bible verses, history and logic. After being disappointed with the church fundamental doctrines, I decided to review all our beliefs. Reading *The Sabbath and the Lord's Day* by H.M. Riggie, the *Sabbath in Crisis* and *Cultic Doctrine* books by Dale Ratzlaff, *The Sabbath under Crossfire* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, consulting the *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary* and comparing it to the timely quarterly lesson entitled "Pillars of our Faith", my wife and I started to realize how hard it is to defend the legalistic sabbath keeping as part of the gospel preached by the historical SDA church.

As I believe happens with many SDA members in transition, we couldn't agree with the church doctrines but were in disbelief that we would be able to find a gospel-centered church that wouldn't run into other doctrinal issues. The support provided by the former Adventists through their web site ([formeradventist.com](http://formeradventist.com)) was very helpful in trying to find a healthy new church community. After visiting a number of churches we were thrilled to find a vibrant and active gospel-centered church in our own town in Pleasanton, CA. We are now becoming members of the non-denominational evangelical Valley Community Church and actively engaging in its small group ministries. We can now with confidence answer a question we had read early on in the *Proclamation Magazine*: "Is there life after Adventism?" Oh Yes, and what a life!!! Christ is now more than ever part of our lives and has touched us in ways we wouldn't imagine.

We would like to thank the support we received from a number of people during our search for the truth, and in particular we would like to thank Dale Ratzlaff for his tenacity in making the truth clear to the people that need it the most, and for his personal support during our journey.

We are praying for the SDA leadership, so that it may sincerely and courageously acknowledge and correct its doctrinal issues, and turn the SDA church into a fruitful church led by love and passion for Christ, rather than fear. We also pray for each of the church members in their search for the truth. That God may guide us individually in our Christian journey and that He may hide us in His care until the day he comes, is our prayer.

**Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.**

PO Box 11587  
Glendale, AZ 85318.