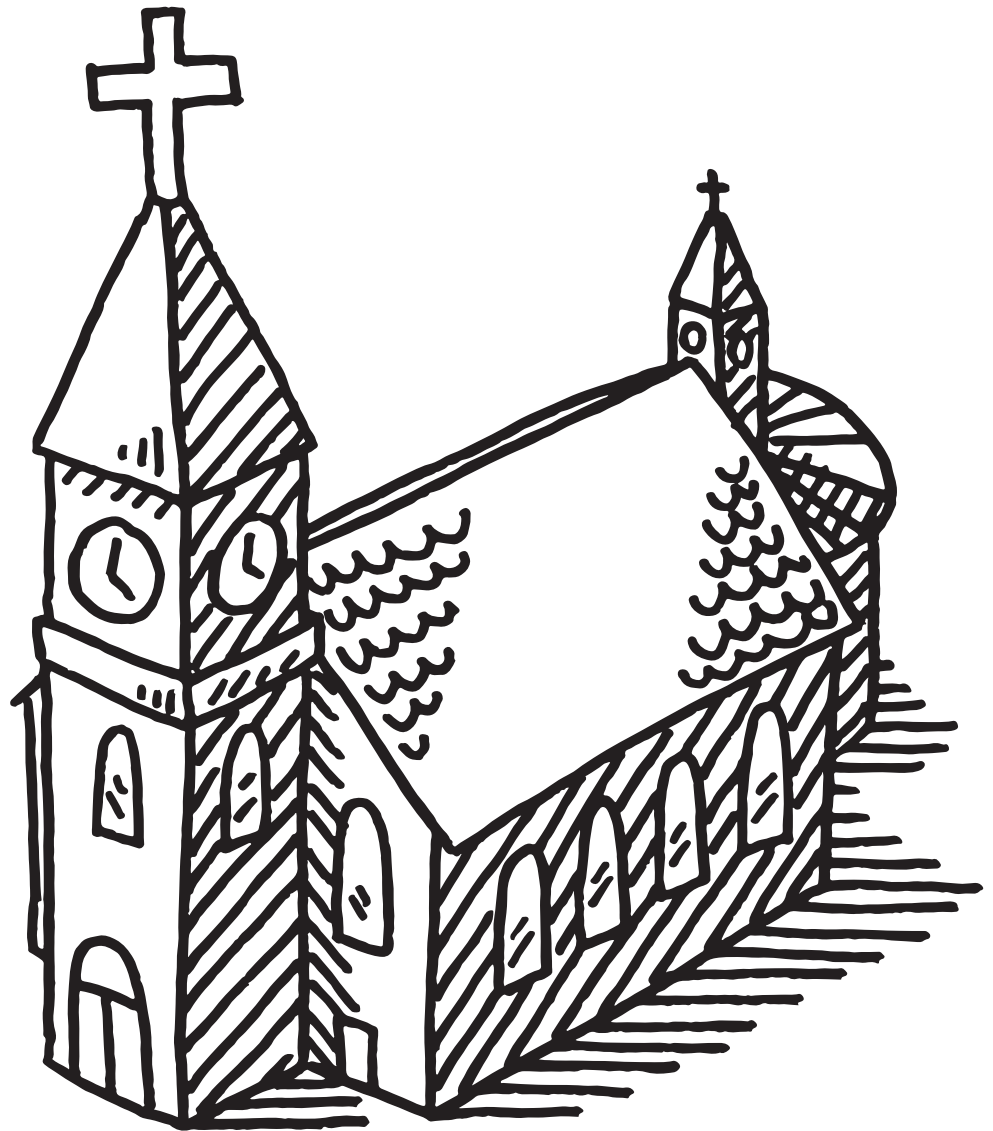


By Jeff Reich



A Sunday-Morning Experience

I was reading the newspaper at my wife's parents' home on a Sunday morning a number of years ago when my attention was drawn to an article that appeared in the religion section. In bold letters an advertisement box said:

The Seventh-Day Sabbath Was Changed to Sunday in Honor of Our Lord's Resurrection.

The subtitle stated:

Those Who Believe in Keeping the Seventh-Day Sabbath Are Modern-Day Judaizers and Are Deceivers to the Fellowship of the Body of Christ.

The article gave many Scriptural references "proving" that the Sabbath had indeed been changed to Sunday and that Christians who keep Sunday are partakers of the New Covenant of grace established in the New Testament. On the other hand, any person who was keeping the seventh-day Sabbath

of the Old Testament was said to be a legalist, a Judaizer, and trying to earn salvation by his own works. The article cautioned the readers to beware of any group that would try to bind the old covenant around their necks, which seemingly could only lead to perdition.

After reading the article, I noticed the name of the pastor who wrote it, the address of his church, and the time when their Sunday School and church services began. Looking at my watch, I said to my wife, "I am going to go attend this church today." She looked at me. "You're not going to cause any trouble, are you?" I smiled. I just wanted to have a friendly visit with this pastor and try to clarify the truth about the Sabbath. I put on my suit, picked up my Bible, got into the car and drove off to attend this church's service.

On arriving at the church, I found it to be the same building I remembered visiting when I was around 12 years old. There had been a Halloween party planned that day, so my folks dropped me off there. At that time, it had been a little Baptist church. The odd thing about this church was that the main entrance was on the side of the building and went right into the main sanctuary.

I was late for the church service, and as I entered, every head turned to look. Being a small congregation of about 50, it was obvious to everyone that I was a stranger. I never have liked being in a situation like this — feeling that everyone is looking at me and wondering who I am and why I am arriving late.

The Church Service

As the opening song ended, the pastor stood to speak. The subject that morning was "The Judgment." He was a good speaker, teaching more than preaching. Behind him stood a whiteboard, and as he explained different scriptures, he wrote them on the board for the congregation to write down for future study or for the sake of just following along more easily.

Every time he quoted a scripture, I immediately turned to it in my Bible. I was more curious about their teachings than anything. This flipping through my Bible caught the attention of the man and his wife sitting next to me, as well as the couples sitting

in front and behind. I was not trying to draw attention to myself as I quietly turned the pages. I think what caught their attention was the fact that many of the pages of my Bible are marked in red, yellow, blue and green (I have cross-referenced many Bible texts in various colors over the years). From time to time, the pastor would look directly at me while he was preaching. I was starting to wonder if maybe I had made a mistake in coming.

One point the pastor brought out in his sermon was found in Matthew 12:36: "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." The pastor built on this idea that every word, thought, and action would come in review before God in the day of judgment. "If this be the case, how ought we to live as Christians?" he asked the congregation. He then exhorted the believers to surrender their lives to Christ in every detail so that in Him they could meet the judgment.

The sermon convicted my heart. It sounded like a sermon you would have heard years ago in an Adventist church. After the church service, as the people in the congregation were standing up to leave, the couple next to me scooted over and asked my name and if I was visiting in the area. Then the couple sitting in front stood up and turned around, joining in the conversation, and the couple from behind also joined the circle. I was happy to see that the church members of this small congregation were so friendly. I started to feel a lot more comfortable.

The pastor came directly down from the podium to personally welcome me. He, too, asked the same questions: Who are you? Are you visiting the area today? etc. I told him how much I enjoyed the sermon, and he humbly gave the credit to God for the words he spoke. I explained that I grew up in this city and was back visiting family.



The New Covenant?

While we were all standing there, I mentioned to the pastor that I had a question about his sermon. He told me to ask whatever was on my heart. "Today you made the statement that our every word, thought, and action were going to come before the judgment seat of God. If that be the case — if we have that high of a standard placed before us — how can we have confidence in the day of judgment?"

"That is easy to answer," he smiled at me. "We first must understand what sin is, then we can answer that question. You see, we are told in 1 John 3:4 that, 'Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.' There are two types of sins: those we are ignorant of and those that are willful. If we have surrendered our lives to Christ, then we will not live in willful sin. Those sins are covered by Christ in the judgment. Also, Christ will not hold us accountable for sins that we were ignorant of. They, too, are covered by Christ in the judgment. As believers in Christ, we can have confidence."

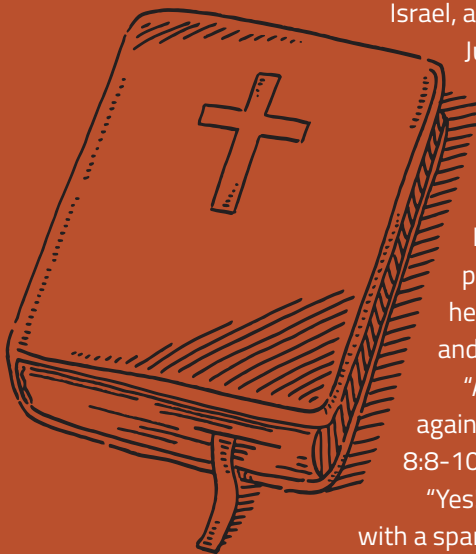
"I follow everything you have just shared," I replied, putting my hand to my chin, "and if I understand you correctly, what you are telling me is the same thing that is promised to us in the Old Testament about the coming of the New Covenant. Like it says in Jeremiah 31:31-33:

'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of

Judah: . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people.'

"And this covenant was again told to us in Hebrews 8:8-10 and Hebrews 10:16."

"Yes!" the pastor exclaimed with a sparkle in his eye.



"This makes sense to me," I went on, "because Jesus said in John 14:15, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' So, for those who love Jesus, He is working in them by His grace and is writing His law upon their hearts and minds. That is why it says in 1 John 5:2, 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.'"

"Yes! That's exactly correct!" the pastor replied with a bit of excitement in his voice. He then explained, "In fact that is why Jesus went on to say — I think it is found, yes right here in John 14:21 — that 'He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.'"

The BIG Question

"And what law do you think Christ was referring to in those passages?" I asked, with wonder on my face.

"Undoubtedly to His moral law given on Mt. Sinai — the Ten Commandments," explained the pastor.

"And what is the fourth commandment?"

The pastor stopped. He looked at me with a great deal of frustration and said, "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it seems that if we really believe that in the New Covenant God is writing His law upon our hearts by His grace, then all the commandments should be written there, don't you think? Yet how often do people leave out the fourth commandment which says:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.' Exodus 20:8-11.

"Each of us knows that the seventh day is truly Saturday and not Sunday," I answered.

"What church do you belong to?" the pastor bel-
lowed.

"I am a Seventh-day Adventist."

Everyone gasped!

"Aren't you afraid of receiving the Mark of the Beast by worshipping here with us on Sunday?"

asked the pastor sarcastically.

"No. I will go wherever the Spirit leads me to learn and share truth. As an Adventist, I worship God seven days a week, but on the Sabbath, I worship in a more complete and dedicated way, as He has asked me to. It is a special day He blessed. It is for fellowship, family, and friends. It is a day of spiritual reflection."

So Why Are You Here?

"So why are you here?" asked the pastor.

"You see, I read your article in the newspaper this morning. I felt convicted to come and tell you that there are people in this world who believe in the New Covenant of grace and that the Scriptures clearly teach: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2:8). And as we partake of this gift, we are in Christ and He in us, and He does write His law upon our hearts in fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant. I see the Sabbath as an outward sign of an inward work of the Holy Spirit. Also, the fourth commandment is the only commandment that starts with the word 'remember.' Yet for some reason, it is the one commandment that everyone wants to forget!

"There are many today who think if you keep the seventh-day Sabbath, you are a legalist, or are somehow trying to be saved by the Old Covenant," I explained, "but if we really believe in the Bible and place it above all other authorities in regard to issues pertaining to faith, then we must accept it for what it says. As we submit to Christ and His word, we will find many things that go against our human inclinations — but by faith we take Him at His word, knowing that 'what he had promised, he was able also to perform.' Romans. 4:21."

The pastor looked at me in disbelief. Maybe he was surprised that I would come to his church to share this. Still frustrated, he asked, "Would you like to stay here with me a while longer to discuss this matter in greater detail?"

"No," I kindly responded, for I could tell he wanted to draw me into a debate. "I just wanted to come this morning to share with you that there are New Covenant, Bible-believing Christians who keep the

Sabbath. That's all."

Shaking his hand and the hands of the elders and their wives, I said good-bye.

The Rest of the Story


That evening I was talking with a friend who lives near this city, and I told him the whole story. "I know what church you are talking about because I work with one of the elders," he told me.

"What does he look like?" I questioned.

"He is a short man with a partly bald head. Kind of heavy, too, and always smiling."

"Interesting. That was the elder who was sitting next to me during the church service!" I exclaimed.

"That's not all," he continued. "I have given this man the books *Desire of Ages*, *Steps to Christ*, and *The Great Controversy*. I know he has read some of these books."

I was once again struck by the way God puts people and opportunities to witness for Him in our paths. We never know who has been reading our books. We never know what doors He will open if we are willing to pass through! 

"And what law do you think Christ was referring to in those passages?" I asked, with wonder on my face.

