

The following “Manifesto” was prepared by Greg Taylor who was pastor of the growing Asheville Seventh-day Adventist church in North Carolina. Please pray for Greg as he is seeking God’s will for continued ministry outside of the SDA organisation.

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

People have often asked me this question, "How can anyone ever leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" I have asked the question myself in times past. “How could a person step away from this message having come to know all the church teaches?” My observations have been that if people left Adventism it was because they had lost their spiritual direction, or had fallen into some sinful lifestyle. This trend has changed in the past number of years, however. More and more people are leaving Adventism and actually becoming more devoted to Christ in the process. This just does not make sense to many in the church because they believe Adventism is “the truth”. How can a person leave “the truth” and still follow Jesus? Even more foreign to this way of thinking is the notion that someone could actually be led out of Adventism as a part of their spiritual growth process. This is the question that I wish to address in the next few pages. I hope you will listen to my journey and prayerfully examine what I have to say. Check things out with the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.

I was born and raised Adventist. I went to SDA schools all the way from grade school through my masters degree. While I did take an excursion away during my teens and early twenties, my name was never removed from the SDA church books. I did not know Jesus although I was baptized at age 12. I was brought up in a legalistic home that strongly followed the teachings of E.G. White. I knew a lot about the law, but little about grace. I was one of those kids that wanted to do right but just did not seem to be able to. So, in time, my failure to live up to all the rules caused me to become discouraged. When I finished at the church- sponsored highschool, or academy as they are called (got kicked out actually), I gave up on God and the church. I ran from anything that sounded like God. This choice nearly destroyed my life and ended with my addiction to drugs and alcohol. For nearly four years I suffered from this addictive lifestyle without hope and in failing health. My life was totally falling apart. I decided to try Jesus one night while I was on a drug experience, and I have never been the same since. The Lord reached down and touched this hard heart of mine in spite of my desperate condition, and He breathed into me new life. I became a born again child of God. I will ever praise the name of Jesus for His unfailing love for me!

As soon as I became a Christian, I checked into a Christian recovery center called the Bridge Fellowship in Kentucky. There I started reading God’s word and growing as a Christian as well as getting clean (sober). After seven months there, the way was opened through my parents to go to Southern Adventist University (then SMC). I went there as a Christian wary of the denomination but anxious to learn about God. Interested in training so I could share the good news with others, I became involved with the student ministry opportunities there on campus and found many Christian friends. It was at Southern that I became an Adventist by conviction. I studied education because I had a passion to teach in a church highschool and help other kids learn about Jesus rather than just legalistic church rules. But by the time I was a senior, the local

conference leaders sought me out to ask me if I would consider becoming a pastor. By this time I was willing to consider serving as a pastor, something I had sensed God leading me to from my childhood, but I had resisted even through most of my college experience. I accepted the call, and served as an intern for one year at one of the local churches there.

During this time, a theology crisis hit the church. Desmond Ford was removed from his teaching position at PUC for his views regarding the Investigative Judgement. Walter Rea was removed from his pastorate because he brought to light the extensive copying that had been done by E.G. White in the writing of her many books. To call the impact on the Adventist community devastating would be an understatement. My senior pastor ended up leaving the SDA system discouraged. I went on to seminary wondering if I was an Adventist. One thing was clear, I knew from my own research in the manuscript documents that E.G. White did borrow extensively from other authors and often attached the "I was shown" phrase to it. I also knew that the doctrine of the Investigative Judgement had serious problems. So I went to Andrews Theological Seminary knowing that I was in a precarious position as far as the church was concerned. I took my new wife of 18 months and went to Berrien Springs.

Several things happened to me at AU that saved me for the SDA ministry. First, several professors just poured grace into me. Ivan Blazen was a Godsend. I flourished under his teaching. I also was blessed by Raoul Dederen and Hans LaRondelle. These men helped me see that the perfectionism of those in the church that opposed Ford was not the position of all the professors. Next, I was able to study the Investigative Judgement and was given a few plausible explanations which at the time quieted my concerns. I know now that these solutions were grossly inadequate, but they were helpful at the time. What is more, some experts from the White Estate came to the campus with a lawyer's report that exonerated E.G. White of legal culpability in the plagiarism charges. While I know today that this was only because of the legal loopholes in the law of her day, not because it was not illegal or wrong, it still quieted my thinking.

The final and most important factor was my first wife, after a little over two years of marriage decided that she was no longer interested in being married. When she left just before the midterms of the winter quarter, my main focus for the next year and a half was to survive. I moved away from the theological difficulties to the focus on my own grieving process. I had to leave my issues with the church on hold in order to survive. I did not directly deal with the theological issues for many years. My confidence in E.G. White was never the same after that however. I knew that there were severe problems with her authority. I still read in *Desire of Ages* and *Steps to Christ*, but I knew that to use her as a biblical commentary on the level with scripture was to ignore the problems with her credibility.

While at Andrews I made the acquaintance of a pretty young communications student named Paula Wesner. We talked a good bit, and were acquainted through campus ministry activities. While we never dated until after I graduated from the Seminary, we developed a great friendship. Upon leaving Andrews we started a long distance relationship that was to end with us getting married in March of 1985.

Paula and I threw ourselves into ministry. At first we pastored in a couple of district settings. We did the evangelistic meetings, etc. I became increasingly uncomfortable with the traditional evangelistic methods, which tended to focus on last-day events and prophetic interpretation. I felt my calling was to reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to lead them to Him as their Savior, and help them learn to live in relationship with Him. What I encountered mostly in the traditional approach was targeted at people already in a church somewhere. The sessions only had one or two nights dedicated to the Gospel, and the rest to our distinctive doctrines. I felt much of the methodology of hiding our name and using a public hall was deceptive. Much of the content of the seminars and series was based on proof texts that I knew were suspect. They were not supported by context. I began to feel frustrated with the district pastorate, and when an opportunity came to be a full time youth pastor, I jumped at the chance. We went to Kettering Ohio and served the youth of that church for six and a half years.

Paula is a natural at hospitality, and I love sharing basic Christianity. It was a perfect setup. We got far away from the theological issues and right into the important ministry of leading these kids to Jesus. Most of them had, like me, been raised in the church but did not know Jesus. Paula provided a warm hospitable environment where this could take place. We saw many kids come to Christ, and some go into full time ministry.

During this time, however, I needed to learn about balance. Youth ministry is extremely time demanding. Planning all week and events all weekend into the wee hours of the morning took their toll. I almost burned out and quit ministry at that time. Thanks to God and to a few good friends I was nursed back to health and found another breakthrough in my spiritual life. I experienced a deepening of my walk with the Lord that was like a conversion on a much deeper level. Paula was growing too. Not just spiritually! She was pregnant with our first son, Jordan. Soon Matthew came along too. These two gifts from the Lord helped us understand God's love for us in a whole new and deeper way. God's grace is so amazing!

Along with children came the realization that we could not keep up the youth ministry and remain balanced. We had a family of our own now to minister to. We also had a deep sense that God was calling us to something special. One day the call came to go to Asheville, NC. There was a church that was trying to move to more contemporary methods of outreach. They were using youth ministry principles to reach adults for Jesus. They were trying methods used by the Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. We prayed much about the decision, because we were well aware of the dangers of trying to transition a church to a more contemporary model. Many have tried and few succeeded. So we prayed intensely for God's guidance. After many clear indications of His providence, we moved to North Carolina. This began an intense yet rewarding season of ministry. A tremendous personal and spiritual growth took place in us. God blessed our church too. In spite of the fact that some 50 people left during the transition from a traditional to a contemporary model, we grew from an average attendance of 120 before the transition to where we now have a vibrant congregation of 500 members. We truly saw the hand of the Lord in the renewal at the Foster church. My evangelism gift was able to be used in such a way that did not force me to use the traditional methods. Paula was able to

use her gifts in hospitality and creative communication, and our boys were able to enjoy many friends and a great community.

During this time we visited Willow Creek for numerous training events. We were so moved by the connection with other Christians who love Jesus and are sold out to reaching the world for Him. The worship times were like a little taste of heaven for us. I remember us discussing how this movement of God was so much more vibrant than anything we had ever experienced in Adventism. I remember thinking and discussing with Paula that the remnant people of God will be people passionate for the reaching of the lost and who love worship. That is the message of the first angel of Revelation 14:6+7. We had such a deep desire to see these things happen in our own local church. Much of what we learned up there we tried to share back home. Gradually God lead us as a church to a more open and expressive style of worship and a deeper commitment to reaching lost people.

For a long time I had a problem with the idea that the Adventists were the one and only remnant church. I felt that the focus was too small and believed the concept of a remnant message rather than that of a “remnant church” was a more realistic interpretation of Revelation 12. The problem of the lack of spiritual renewal in most SDA churches and the presence of abundant life in others outside our church kept bothering me. After about five years at Foster we started to level off in our growth. We were still a vibrant church, but it seemed that we were not truly reaching our target group, unchurched people. While we did reach some unchurched folk, most of the ones we were reaching had some Adventist background. Not that this is not an important group to reach, but that is mostly all we were reaching. I would pray and pray about this. My evangelism gift was burning inside me, yet it seemed that something was blocking my effectiveness. I began to think that there must be something wrong with me. I spent much time soul searching. Is this just an ego thing that makes me want to have a large church, or is it the compassion for lost people that is driving me? I went for some Christian counseling which was most helpful in solving some issues from my past that I was not aware of, and the issues of success/failure that I was dealing with. I was able to look at the parts of me that needed healing and confess them to the Lord, and receive His forgiveness.

Meanwhile, the church remained plateaued. I found that I was not so interested in the size of the church as I was in using the evangelistic gifts God had called me to use. This was a time of deep soul-searching. I knew something was blocking God’s plan for using this gift in my life, but I didn’t know what it was. We explored a few calls, but did not sense the Lord leading us away at that time. I would go away for spiritual retreats and fast and pray asking God for direction. I would claim Luke 11:11-13 for the presence of the Holy Spirit and for clear direction from God.

About this time a friend in a similar ministry had Carl George, an outreach and church growth specialist, come to his church to study it. He had plateaued as well. Carl George’s assessment was that they could not break into the unchurched community because of the Sabbath issues. This was too great a barrier for most people not brought up or married into Adventism. For pastors who are called to reach people for Jesus, this seemed problematic. We must reach the

world yet we are encountering a barrier that is a part of the very structure of Adventism. I just accepted that if God wanted to use us to reach people outside the system, He would make a way.

Meanwhile, a couple of my friends in similar ministries left Adventism to start non-denominational churches. Their initial separation from the SDA church was a result of financial issues between themselves and the conferences they were in. They were struggling to support a full church ministry and send 100% of their tithe away to the conference. This issue is one that every Adventist pastor faces, so I was sympathetic with their situation. However, shortly thereafter they moved away from the seventh-day Sabbath to a Sunday worship format. I must admit that at the time I was angry with them. Not in a rage sort of way, but I felt they had caused a dark spot to be placed on the already shaky contemporary evangelism movement within the church. I had been much less concerned when they left the church over issues with the tithe, since the SDA system does severely strangle the local church of resources. Adventist pastors from the most conservative to the most progressive have problems with that. I had hoped that they would prove that churches could be successful without being a part of the system financially. But the Sabbath issue discredited them in my eyes and in the eyes of most of the SDA church community. I told them how I felt. They were both gracious to listen to my concerns, shared a few of their ideas, and were Christian gentlemen toward me.

When these pastor friends left Adventism and later the Sabbath, I went through a time of study. My primary reason for being an Adventist was the Sabbath. I had believed up to that point that Adventism was the closest church I had ever encountered to teaching Bible truth. For this reason I was solidly an Adventist by conviction, in spite of my concerns regarding Ellen White, the Investigative Judgement and the remnant church teachings. I was convinced that Sabbath was God's special day. My sermons during this time were clearly direct on this issue. I also taught new believers that, while Adventism was not a perfect church, it was the closest to biblical truth as I understood it. Therefore, I had no problem calling people to make a commitment to becoming part of the Adventist church. I would often continue by stating that if I ever discovered greater truth in the Bible I would follow it.

I studied the materials that my friends, who had left the denomination, recommended. I also poured over materials written by Adventist theologians including Samuele Baccocchi, the Church's foremost authority on the Sabbath. In addition, I consulted two of our denomination's most respected professors and writers with a passion to prove where my friends were wrong. I read, studied and convinced myself that the Adventists have the truth on the Sabbath. I also believed E. G. White had the spiritual gift of prophecy even though not reliable as an interpreter of scripture. I saw Adventists as having a remnant message although not exclusively, and the 1844 Investigative Judgement, though complicated, could be made to agree with EGW's position with some creative imagination and proof-texting. But the kingpin for me, however, was the Sabbath. You do away with that and you have no Adventist church. After all it is in the name!

About this time my family and I were preparing to start on a Sabbatical. We had planned to travel around the USA and see national parks and on the weekends visit churches. That is just what we did. We had a wonderful trip. All along the way we asked the Lord to show us what

He wanted us to do with our lives. We wanted to be open to His leadership and follow Him no matter what the cost. Having a whole summer to study, pray, listen and observe seemed like a great way to hear God's voice. And it was a wonderful summer. I would pray and listen each day. Each time I sensed the Lord telling me to just wait. God let me know through deep prayer and study that what He wanted me to learn from the sabbatical experience would hit me all at once and it would be biblical and crystal clear.

During the summer we were struck with the lack of spiritual vitality in all of the Adventist churches we visited. While the people were sincere, there was such a dearth of life it was depressing. It was almost as if they were just going through the motions of "doing church". The Sunday churches were the other way around. With the exception of one church we visited, all of them had such life and joy that it was contagious. We would rejoice when we were in these churches of various denominations or independent communities. When we would visit the SDA churches, we would get so sad and depressed. I remember praying, "Why, Lord, if the Sabbath is so significant and part of your moral law that is binding on all Christians, why are you clearly blessing other churches, while the Adventist churches are, at best, maintaining?" We came back from our Sabbatical energized on the one hand and saddened on the other. We were so glad to get back into our church where there was some vibrancy. Before I went back to work I spent three days by myself on a spiritual retreat studying and praying for God's leading for the next season of ministry. I journaled studied, prayed and reflected. Still the same answer. "You will know what I have for you to learn, and it will be soon. I have a plan for your life and will reveal it through My Word."

Nothing could have prepared me for what happened next. I got a call from a friend that I know is in love with Jesus like few others in my life. I have great respect for his walk with the Lord and commitment to following Him no matter the cost. He opened up to me and shared that he had been studying the Sabbath and was not sure our SDA position was biblically based on the New Testament. It blew me away to say the least, but he mentioned the same issues I had been having concerning the non-sabbatarian churches having such an obvious anointing of the Spirit of God while ours were struggling. I shared my struggles with this question. To make a long story short, several others of my friends that I know are sold out to Jesus were all simultaneously dealing with the same issue. That began an intense time of study for me. I went back to the materials I had studied to argue with my former Adventist colleagues, and this time I decided to study them with an open Bible and an open mind. Perhaps God was trying to tell me something. What I learned from God's word has literally upset my world. At the same time it has been the most liberating and soul satisfying study I have ever embarked on. True to His promise, God has radically transformed my way of thinking. Paula has been blessed deeply by this study also. We have come to an understanding of the Bible in a whole new and powerful way.

I was amazed to discover that the New Testament does not teach Sabbath the way I thought it did. I learned from Colossians 2:16-17, Galatians 4:10, Romans 14:5-6, and Hebrews 3-4, that Sabbath was an institution that pointed forward to Jesus and therefore was no longer binding on Christians. The New Testament points to a Person (Jesus) as the true Sabbath, not a day. I discovered that The Law is reinterpreted, in Christ, for all believers. The New Testament makes

very clear which portions of The Law have carried over in Christ and which have not. Finally, I found that the day of worship is NOT the final test of loyalty to God, rather the test is a full surrender to Jesus Christ sealed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I realize that this understanding needs further development, so I have included a brief survey of my discovery process in the appendix. I would highly recommend taking the time to read and study this material and see whether these things are so.

I remember some years ago there was a “Hidden Picture” craze. These pictures showed up in offices, books, lobbies, etc. Often there could be seen crowds of people gathered around these pictures, that appeared at first glance to be nothing more than a bunch of colors randomly splashed across the page. Nothing more. But as people would concentrate on these works of art, one after another would exclaim loudly, “I see it! I see it!” Then they would immediately coach others on the correct way to look at the painting so they could see it too. I would do my share of staring at these pictures too. I wanted to see whatever it was that was so exciting in these otherwise strange looking paintings. But I was not one of the fortunate ones. I saw nothing.

Then one day I sat down in front of one of these wall hung versions with some time to kill and just stared. It must have been 15-20 minutes I sat there just staring. I was just about to give up and call the whole thing a farce when all at once I saw it! A beautiful three dimensional rendition of the Statue of Liberty seemed to jump off of the canvas. It was truly amazing! I could hardly believe it. Soon I was leafing through a book of similar paintings looking for their hidden secrets. What a discovery! Once I made that initial discovery, all of the pictures seemed to come alive. I could never look at one of these Hidden Pictures the same again.

In much the same way the scriptures came to life for me as I studied. At first I saw what I had always seen. But then one day it came to life for me. I began to see the Bible as I had never seen it before. Once seeing the truth come to life like this I could not see the Bible the same way again. I do not in any way want to put down anyone else’s understanding of scripture. Nor do I want to say that I am right and others are wrong. All I can say is that I have seen a picture of God and His word that has shattered all my previous paradigms. I am grateful for this gift of God’s grace.

Let me say one more thing. The study of the Sabbath, because of my position as an Adventist pastor, carried enormous personal risk. Everything I have ever known as a Christian and a minister could be at risk. My wife also has deep connections in the church. We have life long friends we hold dear. We have a church that we love dearly and that loves us. We have no particular, marketable skills outside of ministry. Paula has put her writing career on hold so she could be at home with our sons. We have no careers to fall back on in an emergency. So it was with fear and trepidation that we started to study not knowing what might come of it, but wanting from the bottom of our hearts to follow Lord even if it meant losing everything. After all we had encouraged people through the years to follow God no matter the cost and trust Him with the results. What kind of spiritual leaders could we be if we refused to risk all for the cause of Christ ourselves.

Some of you may be asking, “What about E.G. White? How does she play into all of this?” Paula and I have taken the position that we are going to be “Bible and the Bible only” people. That does not mean that we do not consider there to be a proper place for spiritual gifts, but because we are to test the gifts by the Word, and not the other way around, in formation of theology, we must go to the Word.

We must also make reference to the fact that there are severe problems with EGW that unfortunately the church has been unwilling to deal with openly. To be fair, we suggest that every concerned Adventist do some research on his or her own and decide what place they wish to make for EGW in their personal theology. I suggest getting on the internet and researching Ellen White. You will find sites that are pro-EGW and others that are critics of her ministry. You should read both and make up your own mind. Remember I Thess. 5:20-22.

We have come to the conclusion from our research that she is not reliable as a prophetic voice. That does not mean that she was not inspirational at times. We both love the books “Steps to Christ” and “The Desire of Ages”. But EGW clearly, knowingly and extensively copied from other sources while claiming that she was NOT doing so except in a few rare cases. Some estimates of her borrowing are as high as 80%. Even the Desire of Ages, my favorite EGW book, has, according to a church sponsored study, “no significant line of thinking that is original” to her. Even in her works where she said “I was shown”, there is evidence of extensive copying. She copied down other’s materials and in many cases the errors right along with the truth.

Some have said that the laws were different back then. She could not have been convicted in a court of law in her day. Maybe not, but James and Ellen were quite adamant that others should not borrow from them without giving credit! They even took others to task that had done so pointing out the dishonesty of the practice. The community feeling regarding literary piracy was much the same. I have in my possession a copy of the Healdsburg newspaper dated March 20, 1889 where the local community was up in arms over some discovered plagiarism in her writings. Clearly it was dishonest and she knew it. The people in her own neighborhood did not approve of it. It was this discovery that forced her to admit using outside sources in the book “Great Controversy”. Even then, she only admitted what she knew others knew about her use of sources.

There is also the cover up of her visions that taught the opposite of what she later believed. Early Writings claims in the preface pages iii and iv that there have been no deletions. They claim to include ALL of her early works. They claim that only a word here and there has been substituted to update the original meaning. All of this was done “under the author’s own approval.” The truth is, significant portions of her early visions were left out and the original meaning was changed. I have seen comparisons between her earlier documents and the book Early Writings. Clearly the deletions were intentional and misleading. EGW knew full well what was going on. These suppressed writings have been covered up by the church and by EGW herself. This was considered by her fellow laborer W. W. Prescott and others to be dishonest and deceptive.

For us, the biggest problem with Ellen White is the effect she has had on the SDA church. There is still wide misunderstanding of the gospel of grace in Adventism. In our years of service this has been an enormous barrier in helping people find assurance. It is not that she did not teach grace. She did teach it beautifully at times, but she also taught perfectionism. Adventists are still basically confused as a people about the very core of the Christian faith. It is so difficult for most Adventists to grasp the Gospel because of these statements. We have never seen an Adventist church truly dedicated to applying the writings of EGW that is a vibrant, alive, growing, happy church community. The responsibility for this falls directly on the shoulders of EGW. Surely a church with 100,000 pages of “inspired” writings should have an even greater grasp on the Good News than other churches. Sadly, this is not the case. Jesus teaches us to test the prophets by their fruits. What do we do with the problems just mentioned? Gal 1:8 says that even if an “angel of light” comes and teaches a different Gospel let him be accursed. Ellen White did not teach a “faith that works” but a “faith plus works” theology, even in some of her later works like the Great Controversy. Read the chapter on the Investigative Judgement and see that you think. With just these issues alone we are compelled to say that EGW is at best unreliable as a prophet. We surely cannot say that we should take her opinions as a companion volume to the Bible.

We believe there are some reasons it is hard to let the full truth about EGW come out. One main reason may be a vested interest in hanging onto the idea that EGW was a true prophet on the scale of one of the biblical prophets. It is part of the “remnant church” identity. Back in 1919 the decision of the Bible Conference held by our General Conference was that there be an immediate disclosure of the problems with EGW as a prophetic voice in the church. They proceeded to attempt to help people understand the truth about her gift. But there was such a backlash against those who were trying to tell the truth, that some key Bible teachers were fired. Unfortunately the denomination stepped away from disclosing the full truth about EGW. An atmosphere of fear to discuss these issues prevailed. Today we have to face this reality after many more years of ingrained misconceptions.

The Revelation 12:17 statement that the remnant will keep the commandments of God (which SDAs take to mean the Ten Commandments, but is not supported by the linguistics as discussed in the Bible study section) is part of this remnant identity in the church. The second part of the passage states that this “remnant” will have the testimony of Jesus. The Adventist perspective then points out that Revelation 19:10 says that the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy. The conclusion: the “true church” of the last days will teach all of God’s commandments including the fourth, and will have a prophet. Many SDAs affectionately call the writings of EGW the “Spirit of Prophecy.”

The problem with this interpretation is that it does injustice to the linguistics and to the context of Revelation. In Revelation 19:10, the “Spirit of Prophecy” is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. It is another name for the Holy Spirit that inspires the prophets. To translate that the testimony of Jesus always refers to the prophetic voice would be to ignore what the rest of Revelation says about the testimony of Jesus. For example in chapter one verse two it says, that John “bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that

he saw.” Is he referring to EGW here? That is surely not a fit. In context it appears to be a reference to the Gospel message. Now notice verse 9. Here, John says he was on the isle of Patmos for “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Does this refer to EGW? No, it is not even a reference to prophecy in general. He had not yet received any prophetic visions. This is a clear reference to the Gospel, the testimony (witness) about Jesus. It became clear to me that to fit EGW into Revelation 12:17 was a stretch as well. I do not want to be guilty of reading my own version of eschatology into the text rather than letting the text speak for itself. This is incredibly dangerous in light of the warnings about adding to or subtracting from the words of the book found in chapter 22:18-19.

Our primary reason for becoming Adventist years ago was our deep desire to serve the Lord. Both Paula and I joined this church (myself by re-baptism in my college days) became SDAs because we believed it was the denomination that most closely followed God’s word. We saw in Adventism a group of people who were not afraid to follow their convictions even if they were not popular positions to take in our culture. We became part of the church primarily because we believed Sabbath observance was required and was honoring to God. We were also attracted to the healthful lifestyle. We believed that Adventism had much to offer the world. We still believe much of what the church teaches.

While Paula and I do not believe the Adventist position, that the Sabbath is morally binding, is biblical, we do believe that it is a healthy way to live and has merit for spiritual growth. We value and support the concept of Sabbath rest. We enjoy the spiritual benefits of taking a day that is dedicated to God and family. We love taking a media fast for a day and letting the noise and clamor cease. This is a part of our spiritual lives that we hold dear and will always treasure. But to insist that it always be on Saturday, or that it is mandated by scripture, is adding to the Word of God an unnecessary requirement for new believers. It constitutes a stumbling block that is not necessary. It gets in the way of many coming to Jesus. We believe that we should remove all obstacles from the path of the true seeker except the scandal of the cross. This is the heart of the message of Galatians and the rest of the New Testament.

Paula and I have a deep love and concern for the Adventist church. We have not been hurt or mistreated. We do not hold animosity toward anyone in the church. The denomination has been very good to us. We do not have any horror stories of mistreatment by leadership as some have. We are grateful for Adventism and what it has meant to our family and our growth in the Lord. Virtually all of our maturing process as Christians has taken place within the Adventist church. We have been blessed deeply by our association with the church. But God is calling us to keep moving. I believe that is His intention for the Adventist church as well. There truly was merit in what the Adventist pioneers believed. They were adamant about not becoming another denomination but insisted in calling themselves a movement. By this they were indicating that if they discovered more truth, they would follow it and leave the mistakes behind. The Adventist church has much to offer. If it would keep moving, I believe it could have a tremendous impact on the world as a part of God’s remnant church at large. But in a very real sense, Adventism must face it’s dark side. It must keep moving and allow God to mold and make it into what He intends it to be.

We are probably more “adventist” than we have ever been. I mean, of course, that we are passionate about the soon return of Jesus. This is why it is time, high time, that all churches stop promoting their own brand of Christianity as the “only true” exclusive community, and instead band together for the common cause of reaching the world for Jesus. This was the passion of Jesus in John 15. “By this will all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” The mark of true Christian maturity is this love for one another and getting on with taking the message of Jesus to the world. Jesus’ prayer in John 17 makes clear that He longs for the unity of His church. It is this unity that will attract the world to Jesus Christ. When Christians fight among themselves it only reaffirms unbelievers in their impression that Christianity is just another human institution.

Unity in purpose is what the true remnant of bible prophecy is all about. In all my years of ministry I can never recall any of us rejoicing over the success of a Billy Graham Crusade. I never heard anyone praising God that Greg Laurie had a successful Harvest Crusade. I must include myself in this group. Why? Because these men weren’t part of the “true church”. This attitude can unfortunately be found in many church systems. This is not just an SDA phenomenon. I have had to take a hard look at my own attitudes over the years. We believe that the time has come for us to lay aside the exclusivism that has crippled the Christian church for centuries (see Gal. 4:17) and get on with the Gospel Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). We are convinced that this is Jesus’ dream for His church in these last days. We believe that the highest form of worship, the most God-honoring path we can choose is to follow Jesus as He leads us. We believe that His remnant are those who obey His commandments to love Him fully, love others as themselves, and are totally sold out to telling the world about Him..

As I write this, I do not know what the future will hold. I do not know what will happen to us financially. I must say that there was a real sense in which I had to face a dark part of my own personality in this struggle. I valued being a respected SDA pastor and having people think well of me. To think that others whom I had known and served in Adventism might lose respect for me was incredibly difficult for me to accept. I had to, in a very real sense, repent for having loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Now I am resolved that “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” We will find our rest and security in Him. And we will look forward to the seeing how God leads us and how he leads all of you in the months and years that follow. Our prayers are with you and we solicit your prayers for us.

We hope that someday the Adventist church will face some of these issues. We pray that one day soon there will be a courageous move made on the part of the leadership to reexamine the “pillars of the faith” and ask God to give them the courage to study openly, without risk, the fundamental teachings and see what the scriptures teach without worrying what will happen if there is a discovery that there have been some mistakes along the way. It takes courage to face difficult issues. But courage is one of the qualities that Adventists have been noted for in the past. We are confident that the same quality still exists.

We do not think the church will suffer long term from such a study. Perhaps the image that the Adventists are the one and only remnant church would fall by the wayside. Perhaps the Investigative Judgement would hit the theological grave yard too. There might be a whole new approach to the Sabbath. It might be that Sabbath would be a suggested spiritual discipline rather than a moral ought. The name “Seventh-day Adventist” might be reduced to just “Adventist” so as to keep the focus on Jesus rather than the law. Healthful living might be taught from a suggested lifestyle approach rather than a requirement that gets confused with salvation. Maybe the church could become known as a church that truly is based on the Bible and the Bible alone. Perhaps there might even be some apologies made to those Christian groups that have been cut down and abused by the “evangelists” who called them “Apostates” and “Babylon”! Maybe the focus in evangelism would shift toward reaching the 130 million unchurched people in this country instead of primarily those already connected to a church family. Perhaps the Adventists around the globe would become known as a people passionate about reaching people for Jesus, cooperative in connecting with other Christian groups, and totally unselfish in using the church’s massive resources for the cause of Christ.

Maybe all of this sounds like a dream, but can you imagine how God could bless an organization with that kind of courage and authenticity? Imagine how spiritual seekers and believers alike would respect such authentic spirituality. But it will not happen if there are not at least a few that are praying for true revival and unity in the body of Christ, the unity that comes when all true Christians take John 17 seriously. When Christians start loving one another and telling the good news to the world instead of clumping in little exclusive denominational groups and pretending they are the only ones, there will be a revival of mammoth proportions. It will not happen, however, if there are not at least a few that are willing to stand up and speak their minds. We happen to know that there are many SDAs among the grass roots, including some pastors, administrators, and teachers, that have this heart. But nothing will happen as long as it just takes place in little discussions in the back rooms. Some of us need to have the courage to speak up and tell the truth. Someday we believe that God is going to accomplish these things in Adventism. We will be praying daily for just such a revival..

Love to all of you!

In Christ Jesus our Security and Rest,

Greg and Paula Taylor

APPENDIX: THE BIBLICAL JOURNEY

To start with Paula and I each took separate journeys with our study. We each had unique issues that were of concern to us. Therefore we tried to do our own study and not influence one another concerning the outcome. I will take you along my path with me. First I decided that all of the Bible is God’s word and is inspired by Him. Secondly, I tried to put in place the principle of Bible study that lets the New Testament interpret the Old, not the other way around. They are

both inspired, but there needs to be greater emphasis on the New Testament, and here is why. The word Testament or Covenant means the same thing as a Will, or some other legal contract. My wife and I have made out several Wills during our marriage. We had a Will before we had kids. We had a Will made after the birth of our first child. We made another after the second child, and recently we updated our Will again. Now if we were to die in some tragedy, which Will would be binding for our executor to follow? The most recent or newest one of course. The same is true of the Old and New Testaments or Wills. There are important teachings in the Old Testament, there is much history and background information that helps us understand God better. But to go to the Old Testament for application of God's will for our lives first, would be to get things out of order. The New Testament was written to give us a more full revelation of God's workings in human history. It gives us the fullest revelation of all, Jesus Christ. Since we must apply the message of Jesus to our personal lives as post-cross Christians, the epistles are given specifically for that purpose. Jesus came to fulfill much of the system of Judaism, for example. He came to fulfill some of the aspects of the Old Covenant or Testament. How do we know which ones? The Gospels do not spell out which ones. The epistles do that. So I went first to the New Testament (Covenant or Will) and specifically to the epistles to see what is taught there about the application of the Sabbath to Christians today. Then I went to Jesus life to see if He made room for such an interpretation in His life and ministry. Finally I went back to the Old Testament to see if what is written there agrees with the epistles and Jesus on the subject.

The first text I studied is found in Colossians chapter two. I am using the New King James version of the bible and all of the emphases are my own. In the book of Colossians, Paul is addressing a syncretistic heresy that is a mixture of angel worship, and ascetic practices. But mixed into it all is the judaizing element (Jewish legalists who were pushing Jewish law) that is trying to influence these new Christians. In the Colossians two passage, the focus is on the Jewish part of the heresy. Starting with verse 11, Paul focuses on the fact that circumcision has been replaced by baptism so circumcision is no longer required. Then He points out that the record of our sins has been nailed to the cross as soon as we accept Jesus. Finally, Paul discusses the last two Jewish distinctives. Notice verses 16 and 17. "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ".

Paul is saying that the Colossians should not let these judaizers lay a guilt trip on them about the food laws, or the festivals, new moons, or sabbaths because these were part of the system that prefigured or pointed forward to Christ. Now all my life in the church I was taught that the sabbaths referred to here were the ceremonial sabbaths of the Jewish feasts, not the weekly Sabbath. But what I was amazed to discover is that this is definitely NOT the case. Throughout the Old Testament, this construction is used. Paul was simply reiterating a formula that was used repeatedly to refer to the whole old system including the seventh-day Sabbath. This same construction is found in ascending or descending order repeatedly. There can be no mistake what he meant. The "sabbaths" in this common Old Testament construction always refer to the weekly Sabbath. To try to make this Colossians passage refer to ceremonial festival sabbaths ignores this construction.

First of all, the book of Leviticus chapter 23 gives all of the religious feasts. At the top of the list is the seventh-day Sabbath. Then the other feasts are listed. Now look at 1 Chr. 23:31. “And at every presentation of a burnt offering to the Lord on the sabbaths, the new moons, and on the set feasts...” they were to take care of the needs of the priests and the tabernacle. Clearly this refers to the weekly, the monthly and the seasonal festivals. II Chr. 2:4 says essentially the same thing. (See also Neh. 10:33, Hos. 2:11, Eze. 45:17) Throughout the Old Testament, the same construction is used. The weekly, the monthly, the seasonal, and sometimes the yearly or sabbatical years are included. Sometimes the order is reversed, but the same principle applies. The “sabbaths” referred to in Col 2:16-17 are clearly referring to the seventh-day Sabbaths. It would be redundant and totally out of literary character for this to refer to the appointed feasts. It would read “Let no one judge you regarding festivals, new moons, or festivals”. That would not make sense. Even Samuele Bacciocchi (sabbatarian author) admits that this is the case. He agrees that the weekly Sabbath is what is being referred to here,¹ though he goes on to say that it is not the proper keeping of the Sabbath that is being discussed, but the perversion of the keeping of the day that is being alluded to.²

The clear biblical problem with Bacciocchi’s theory is that the text continues by describing these Sabbaths and festivals as “shadows of things to come,” the “reality is Christ.” These religious holidays, including the Sabbath, were symbols pointing forward to Jesus. They were typological prefigurations of Jesus. How could the perversion of a symbol be a shadow or prefiguration of Christ? The most reasonable rendering of the text is that the weekly Sabbath is included in the ceremonial/sacrificial system that was FULFILLED IN CHRIST! No other explanation made sense to me. No other interpretation does justice to the context or the Old Testament construction.

When I first read this the way Paul clearly intended it, I could not believe what I was reading! Paul was making a radical transitional statement here! The Sabbath fulfilled in Christ? Could it be true? More questions popped into my mind. What about the 10 Commandments, aren’t they eternal? What about the Sabbath being from creation? I had so many questions. I had to search all of this out.

The next stop was the book of Galatians where Paul again makes reference to Sabbath in his scathing rebuke of the judaizing heresy that had threatened the Galatians church. Here Paul explains the purpose of the Law to these gentile believers. To get the feel of the argument he is using, we must start back in Gal 3:16.

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say ‘and to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘and to your seed,’ who is Christ. And this I say that the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promises of no effect.”

¹Samuele Bacciocchi, *Sabbath Under Crossfire* (Biblical Perspectives, 1998) p. 245-248.

²Ibid. 246-248.

What Paul is saying is that the covenant with Abraham was given pre-law. And it was made with Christ in mind. Let's continue with verse 18.

“For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. What purpose then does the law serve? It was ADDED because of transgressions ‘TILL the Seed should come to whom the promise was made...’”

Paul is saying that the law was added well after the promises to Abraham, until Christ. There was a definite BEGINNING and ENDING of the Law. This is crucial to understand to follow Paul's argument. Now notice verses 23 and following.

“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which was afterward to be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Paul continues with His discussion ending chapter three with the famous statement in verse 29. “If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.” What Paul is saying is that the promise of Christ came BEFORE the Law. It is independent of the Law. The Law was ADDED show us our need of Christ. It was our tutor to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by FAITH. Clearly Paul is pointing out that the Law was a TEMPORARY institution to show us our need of Christ. But when we accept Jesus, we are under the covenant which was pre-circumcision and pre-law, the covenant with Abraham. The Christian now stands with righteous Abraham, an heir of the promise, bypassing the entire Law era! I had never seen the significance of this passage before! I had to read and re-read it. I encourage you to sit down with the book of Galatians and read and digest this for yourself. The message is so powerful and liberating! It also sets the stage for understanding the rest of the book.

In chapter four, He continues his argument by discussing the absurdity of going back to the “elementary principles,” or “weak and beggardly elements” which contextually are a clear reference to going back to law based living. Then in verses 9-11 he says the following:

“But now after you have known God or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggardly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage. You observe DAYS AND MONTHS AND SEASONS AND YEARS. I am afraid for you lest I have labored for you in vain.”

I could hardly believe my eyes as I read this scripture. I had read it many times before, but never understood it. This time the words seemed to jump off the page for me much like the “Hidden Pictures” I mentioned in the letter portion. Could Paul have been any clearer? Knowing the pattern for religious holidays in the Old Testament, it suddenly clarified for me what was at issue here. The judaizers had been teaching these new Christians that they had to keep the Sabbaths and the rest of the feasts as part of their commitment to Christ. The days, months, seasons, and

years follow the same pattern of the Jewish holiday system including the Sabbath. The judaizers were telling the Galatians that they MUST keep Sabbath and the other feasts. Paul is clearly saying that observing these holidays is NOT REQUIRED for Christians. He sees that doing so could be DANGEROUS to their maturity as Christians. He is saying that these things do NOT have value because the law was a temporary institution. Christians are accepted on the basis of Jesus fulfillment of the law and treated as pre-law Abrahamic descendants! The message of Galatians seemed to literally come to life for me. Those hard to understand passages suddenly made perfect sense!

The book of Galatians has one basic theme from beginning to end. Do not go back to keeping the law, including the Sabbath. While there is much instruction about moral living, the appeal is never to the law in Galatians or in any of Paul's writings for that matter. He lumps the Sabbath with those things that are no longer binding, and possibly dangerous, if made into a part of one's salvation. Paul clearly teaches responsible morality and I will go into that later, but his appeal is to Christ living in you, not to law.

The next text I studied was Romans chapter 14. Here Paul takes a softer approach. Here the Jewish and Gentile Christians are living side by side, There are some that are highly concerned about food that might have been offered to idols, and others are saying that idols do not exist so they eat just about anything. But some are judging one another's spirituality based on these behaviors. Paul steps in to mediate in the dispute. It is in this context that the holiness of certain days over others comes up again. Here it is an issue of Christian unity not one of requirements for salvation, so he is much more gentle. Notice verses 5-6.

“One person esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord: and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it...”

Paul is again making the same statement again, though in much gentler language, that the sacredness of days is no longer an issue for Christians. As long as people are fully convinced in their own minds, he has no issue with it. But it must not become an area of passing judgement on others. As we have seen before, Sabbath should never be confused with a person's salvation. Again, Paul makes Sabbath a non-issue for New Testament Christians. His instructions have some strong implications for those of us who have, in the past, made Sabbath a “saving truth” and one that we judge the “loyalty” of others by. I had to take a hard look at some of the things I have taught in the past.

Next in my study, I went to Hebrews chapters three and four. There is not time or space to do a full study of any of these passages, but it would be helpful to read this scripture before reading my comments. I noticed that the word “Today” is used 5 times. I also noticed that the children of Israel did not enter God's rest because of unbelief. They were resting each week on the Sabbath in the wilderness, because if they didn't they would have been executed for Sabbath breaking. But they missed out because of UNBELIEF. Even when Joshua led them into the promised land they still did not enter the rest. Notice verse 3 of chapter 4.

“We who have BELIEVED do enter that rest...” (this is the key to this passage. Entering God’s rest is a matter of believing in Jesus.) (v. 6) “ Since it remains therefore that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day saying in David “TODAY” after such a long time as it has been said, ‘TODAY, if you will hear his voice do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest (Sabbatismos in Greek which means Sabbath-like rest) for the people of God for he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his labors as God did from His”.

The author of Hebrews is saying that those who believe are resting in a Sabbath-like rest. The time to enter that rest is another day called TODAY! Five times in the passage Today is repeated. The Sabbath-like rest that is offered to us in Christ is a "Today" experience; today and every day as we trust in Christ’s righteousness and rest from any trust in our own works. Here again the New Testament indicates that the Sabbath is a FULFILLED institution. Here we see that Jesus is our Sabbath-like rest. When we trust Him by faith, we are experiencing Sabbath-like rest each and every day of our lives! What a beautiful concept! Jesus is your Sabbath and mine when we trust daily in Him. My eyes were starting to see another perspective than I had ever seen before.

There are some who have tried to make this text a reason for continued Sabbath keeping, but that ignores the context of the passage. It also ignores the greater context of the book of Hebrews. The entire book is dedicated to showing the superiority of Christ to all of the Old Testament system. For example Hebrews one emphasizes His superiority to the whole Old Testament scriptures (1:1-3). In verses four and following, He is shown as being superior to all the angels. In chapter three he is seen as being superior to Moses, in chapters 5-7 He is superior to all the priests introducing a new order, the order of Melchizedek. In chapters 8-10 He is a greater sanctuary/temple, a greater sacrifice, a greater covenant. The entire book of Hebrews is about Jesus being better than, and the fulfillment of, the entire Old Testament/covenant system. To try to say, in the middle of this theme, that Sabbath is a binding day for Christians is to miss not only the context of Chapters 3-4, but the larger context of the book. The logical point that the author is making is that **JESUS IS A BETTER SABBATH** than the old literal one-day-a-week rest, but **HE IS OUR REST TODAY AND EVERY DAY AS WE TRUST IN HIM!** He is the true temple, the true Passover, the true law, the **TRUE SABBATH!** As I started to study all of this out, my heart would just burn within me as I saw the significance of Jesus in this book

The next few passages in Hebrews just underscore what the study had taught me thus far, but they made even more clear what the New Testament or New Will is saying about what carries over from the Old. Notice some of these selected verses from Hebrews 8-10. Please do not take my word for all of this. Get out your own bible and study for yourself what is being said here. Study the context and the verses in between my selections to see if these things are so. Let’s start

with chapter 8 right after the phrase in verse five that refers to the temple system as a “shadow of heavenly things” (interesting similarity to Col. 2:16-17) Notice verse six.

“But now, He has obtained a more excellent ministry inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a BETTER COVENANT, which was established on better promises. For if the first covenant had been faultless than no place would have been sought for a second...”

V.13 “In that He says, ‘a New Covenant,’ He has made the first OBSOLETE. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

9:15 “And for this reason He is the Mediator of a the New Covenant by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”

10:1" For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer year by year make those who approach holy...”

10:9 “ ...He takes away the first that He may establish the second...”

I urge you who are reading my reflections to take some time to immerse yourself in the teaching of Hebrews 8-10! There is so much meat in these chapters. Now on to my next stop, II Cor.3:6ff.

“Our sufficiency is from God who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and ENGRAVED ON STONES was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was PASSING AWAY, ...”

As I studied these passages, I became convinced that a radical change had taken place in the Cross event. Much greater than I had ever grasped before. I began to see that the dividing wall of hostility that Christ broke down, referred to in Ephesians 2:11-19, truly did include all of the law including the specific laws that divided Jews and Gentiles. The Sabbath, the feasts, the clean and uncleanness laws, the sacrificial system, circumcision, all of it was fulfilled in Jesus. Thereby Christ has truly made all believers one in Himself.

Another passage I looked at was Acts 15. In acts 15 we find the leaders of the church gathered in Jerusalem to decide what laws will be binding on the Gentile Christians. There have been those (the judaizers) who were teaching that unless a person is “circumcised according to the law of Moses they could not be saved” (15:1) These judaizers, of the sect of the Pharisees that had become Christian, were requiring circumcision and keeping the law of Moses on all new converts. Paul and Barnabas were adamant that such requirements should not be placed on new believers. Peter agreed with them and said (v.10-11) "Now therefore why do you test God by

putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" He goes on to point out that we are saved by grace not the law.

At this point it is necessary to highlight the fact that the entrance sign of becoming a Jew was the sign of circumcision. Once one was circumcised, he was then required to keep all of the laws. This included the Sabbath which was the continuing sign of allegiance to the Old Covenant as we will soon see. Obviously the sign of circumcision was not clearly visible unless the men were in a locker room at the Gym but the continuing sign of the Sabbath was very obvious, and both men and women participated in this sign. Failure to keep Sabbath was punishable by death. (Ex 31:14)

The Sabbath sign was not expected of those who were not officially Jews, however. The entrance sign of circumcision was a prerequisite sign for entrance into the Jewish community. Once one had become circumcised, he was then under obligation to keep all the rest of the law including the Sabbath.

The rules regarding Sabbath involved not carrying a burden, not building a fire, not traveling, and, of course, not working in any way. This was to apply to the Jews and also to the stranger within their gates or their households. It was not applicable to the strangers who "sojourned among them". Only to those within their gates were required to keep Sabbath. There were also the food laws, and the laws of uncleanness that were part of this system, and marked the Jews as separate from the rest of the world around them. It is clearly these requirements that Peter was referring to as a burden too heavy to bear.

In Acts 15 they came to a solution. They decided to not place on the new converts any of the specific regulations that were part of the covenantal system of Judaism. They did not require the entrance sign, so the rest of the laws would not apply either. Just like we do not require someone who is not baptized to follow all the guidelines of a particular church. The regulations that they did require had their origins in the Noaic covenant, (see Gen 6-10 which included worship of the true God, avoiding things strangled and blood, and sexual immorality). These were considered by Jews everywhere to be required of ALL PEOPLE since the covenant was with Noah. Leviticus 17-18 expands on these and defines what is meant by these regulations. In each case in Leviticus 17-18 it is made clear that they are binding on the "stranger that sojourns among you". (Notice the clear distinction between this group and the "stranger that is within your gates") Notice also in Acts 15:20 these regulations ARE considered binding on the new converts. The reason being that there were Jewish people in every city that read the law of Moses each Sabbath, and they would expect someone who fears the Lord, even if not a part of the Jewish circumcised /Sabbath keeping/observant community, to follow these guidelines. Why? Because the Jews believed they were universal requirements based on the NOAIC covenant. For any Jew to respect a Christian, the believer must be seen as following the Noaic laws at least. Hence, the early church council decided to require Noaic covenant stipulations on all Christians, but did not require the Mosaic regulations. The ruling was repeated again in the letter that went out to the gentile churches in V.28-29. The result was great rejoicing in the church.

What became crystal clear as I studied, was that Sabbath was NOT one of the requirements placed on these new believers. What is more, the argument that some have put forward, (one I used to promote) just did not fit. The objection states that since there was no big debate over the Sabbath in the early church and there was so much said about circumcision, that Sabbath must have still been required. If circumcision was such a big deal, wouldn't Sabbath have been a bigger issue? Not really. Where there was no entrance to the Jewish community through circumcision, there was no Sabbath requirement. The entrance sign came first. The continuing sign was immaterial if the initial sign was not present.

One argument that I have heard, and used myself at one time, was the fact that Paul's custom was to go to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. This must mean that he thought it was still binding. Right? Not Necessarily. The problem with the argument is that it fails to take into consideration Paul's MOTIVATION for being there. It was Paul's custom to go to the synagogue to EVANGELIZE the Jews. He would go to the Jews first (Rom.1:16) whenever he went to a new city. He would teach there until he was thrown out, and then he would meet with the gentiles.

Another Text that is often brought up, especially in Adventist circles, is the whole Revelation scenario taught by the Adventist church. According to this view, the Sabbath, because it was the seal or sign of the old covenant (see Ex. 31:12-18), must therefore be the "Seal of God" in Revelation. So many conclude that the Sabbath must be the final test of loyalty for all mankind. This view also emphasizes Revelation 12:17 which describes the remnant church as keeping the commandments of God and having the testimony of Jesus. There are a couple of problems with this conclusion. First, the New Testament does NOT anywhere call the Sabbath the Seal Of God. In fact, the Seal of God in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit. (See Eph. 1:13-14, Eph 4:30,

II Cor. 1:22) To ignore this clear teaching is to miss the whole point of that Revelation is trying to say. Secondly, the word John uses for commandments (entole' in Greek) is never used in John's writings to refer to the ten commandments.³ When John is speaking of the Law in general or the ten commandments in particular, he always uses the word for law in the Greek which is "nomos". When John uses "entole'" he does so in conjunction with the instructions of Jesus for practical love of one another. So the verse Revelation 12:17 translates into English (in harmony with John's use of entole') "those who truly love one another, and are telling the world about Jesus. This fits perfectly with the Seal of God motif in Revelation as well. The Holy Spirit according to John 13-16 is another Comforter. He lives in us and guides us. He is the INDWELLING JESUS in our lives. The Seal of God in the last days represents those who have a daily personal walk with Jesus through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to be sealed. It is the same message as Hebrews 3-4. When we are resting in Jesus today and every day, He is our Sabbath. The Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance! (Eph. 4:14). In Short, the seal of God is Jesus living in us through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Mark of the Beast, in turn, would be those who choose to NOT believe, who refuse to accept the gift of grace, who

³Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (Applegate, California,1990) pp 310-311.

refuse to rest in Jesus, and choose rather to depend on another way. Those who choose to depend on their own works instead of trusting in God's only son, have the Mark of the Beast.

I spent a great deal of time in the application section of the New Testament. It became clear that there is not a continued binding requirement for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. What comes through loud and clear in the New Testament epistles is that Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath. The day-ness has been, at the very least, de-emphasized. It is NOT to be used as a dividing issue or binding command for gentile Christians. It is not to be seen as a test of loyalty. Instead, a daily walk with Jesus through the agency of the Holy Spirit is the new SEAL or TEST.

The next question I needed to ask was, "What did Jesus teach and what significance did He place on the Sabbath?" I remembered that Jesus came as one under the law to perfectly obey the law. (Gal. 4:4-5) so He had to live under all of the law's requirements. At the same time, I needed to see whether he taught and lived in such a way as to set the stage for a fulfillment motif, or did he teach a continuance theology.⁴ I began in Matthew 5:17. Jesus says,

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled"

At first glance this text seems to indicate that the continuance theory is correct in Jesus teaching. But a closer examination reveals otherwise. First, I noticed the phrase, "Law and Prophets". Jesus is not referring to the 10 commandment Law here specifically. He is using the word "nomos" to refer to the entire first five books of Moses. "The Prophets" refers to the rest of the Old Testament. If one "jot" or one "tittle" cannot pass from the law, we must not mix one type of cloth with another, we must execute Sabbath breakers, we must not have relations with our spouses until at least seven days after the woman's period ends. We must sacrifice animals, and all the rest. By the way for you non-vegetarians, you must not mix milk products with beef. (a big Mac is a sin). If you touch a dead carcass you must be quarantined. All of the religious feasts still apply. Is that what Jesus is saying? NO! The key word to understanding this passage, I discovered, is the word "FULFILLED". Jesus is saying that no part of the law can be ignored, not even the least stroke of a pen, even if heaven and earth pass away. You can't do it yourself or teach others to do so, until all is FULFILLED

If you read on in the book of Matthew and the other Gospels the word "fulfilled" is repeated over and over. Get an exhaustive concordance and check it out. Here are a few examples. Mt 1:22 -

⁴Ibid. pp There are really three schools of thought in regard to the Sabbath. There is a small group which includes the SDA's that teach that the Sabbath has continuance in the New Testament. A second group teaches a transference theology and states that the Sabbath command is still binding, but sacredness of the day was transferred from Sabbath to Sunday. (This was actually a much later development in the Christian church. Early Christians did not teach either of these first two concepts.) Finally there is a larger group of Christians that teach that Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath and the Law. He is our Sabbath rest. .

23 refers to the fulfillment of the prophecy about the virgin being with child. Mt. 2:15 discusses the prophecy that he would be called out of Egypt. Mt. 8:17 is about the fulfilled prophecy concerning His healing ministry. The list goes on and on. Finally, in John 19:28 we find these words,

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled said, ‘I thirst!’ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there and they filled a sponge with sour wine and put it on hyssop and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished’ and bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.”

Jesus did not come to destroy but to "FULFILL". This fulfillment motif fit perfectly with what I had learned so far in the application section of the New Testament. So I went on to the next section. Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus where Jesus calls Himself the rest provider. “Come to ME all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest” Immediately after this statement we get into the Sabbath debates. Read Mt 12 1-8 and then notice the following points. Jesus is with his disciples walking through the grain fields eating some of the heads of grain and they get stopped by the religious patrol for working on the Sabbath. This was not an infraction of the Mosaic code, only of some of the rabbinic traditions, but it is interesting to see how Jesus answers the accusations. First He tells the story of David and how he, the anointed king to be, asked for Showbread to eat from the sanctuary. Not a lawful thing to do, but since he was on king’s business he did so without being guilty. The question I asked myself was, “What type of law was David breaking? A moral law, or a ceremonial law?” The ceremonial of course. David was not exempt from moral laws. We know that when he broke the 7th commandment, there was a severe price to pay. Next, in verse 5, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the priests in the temple can break Sabbath while doing their priestly duties. Now I asked again, which category of commandments does this priestly office fall under? The priestly system is clearly under the ceremonial system. Were the priests exempt from the moral commands? Could they lie, cheat, steal, commit adultery? No. of course not. Finally, I jumped over to John 7:22-23 for a second. There Jesus says to his accusers that the law of Moses regarding circumcision takes precedence over the Sabbath. If the day to be circumcised happened to be the Sabbath, the circumcision was carried out. Now I asked myself again, “What category of law is the Sabbath placed in each of these scenarios?” The ceremonial! The Sabbath is “trumped” by the ceremonial every time. What category does this place Sabbath in then? Ceremonial of course! Jesus is saying to the accusers, If David can do it, if the priests can do it, if circumcision can happen, then the Anointed one, the Son of Man, surely is Lord of the Sabbath. He is over and above these ceremonial regulations.

I must admit that this discovery effected me deeply. Jesus clearly lumped the Sabbath with the things that we know now were shadows of what was to come. He lumped Sabbath with the ceremonial system. He set the stage for Colossians 2:16-17. He called himself the REST PROVIDER, and the LORD OF THE SABBATH. This fits exactly with what we find in the Colossians 2:16-17. Mark in Mark 2:27 adds one statement to this. “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” Some Adventist scholars say this means that it was

established at creation and therefore a moral ought and binding for all time. But the problem with that interpretation is the linguistics do not bear this out. Jesus is not making a universal statement here. He is basically saying that the Sabbath was made for the man, not the other way around. The context clearly teaches that Sabbath is not in the category of moral oughts. It is lumped in with the temporary or ceremonial system. This truth, right from the heart of Jesus Sabbath teachings, truly opened up to me a new paradigm. I had always studied these passages with the agenda of showing that Sabbath must be the Lord's Day. (therefore the Revelation 1:10 statement about the Lord's day must be referring to the seventh-day Sabbath and not to Sunday). While doing that, I had missed the clear message from the passage. Jesus was plainly setting the stage for a fulfillment theology.

One more observation. The passage in Matthew begins with Jesus calling Himself the Rest Provider. Mark's account starts with this statement in Mk 2:22. "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins." In Luke's account of the same story, the same introduction is used. (Lk. 5:36-39) Jesus is saying, and the Gospel writers understood it, that it is not possible to hang onto the old system and at the same time make room for the true Sabbath, Jesus Christ. One or the other will have to give. No, Jesus does not directly say that the Sabbath will no longer be a binding issue in the new era, but He does endorse it fully by what he taught and modeled. He clearly points to Himself as the one to which it all points and warns against letting the form cause us to miss the true Sabbath, Himself.

Another illustration from the Gospels that just blew me away because I had never seen it before, comes in Luke 4:16. To set the background, a knowledge of the Sabbath system in the Old Testament is essential. Starting in Leviticus 23 the system is laid out. It starts with the weekly Sabbaths that point forward to the monthly and yearly festivals, that in turn point forward to the Sabbatical years, which point forward to the ultimate Sabbath, the year of Jubilee. After the seventh sabbatical was celebrated, on the 50th year there was to be a year of Jubilee when all the land was to be returned to original owners, all the slaves were to be freed, all the indentured servants were considered debt free. It was a year of freedom. It was this Jubilee that was referred to in Isaiah 61:1-2 in reference to the coming Messiah. He was to usher in the ultimate Jubilee. Now with that backdrop notice what Luke 4:16ff says;

"So he came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, And as his custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. And He took the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set a liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' Then He closed the book and gave it to the attendant sat down, and the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"

Jesus not only claimed to be the Messiah in this statement, but He called himself the JUBILEE! Jesus called himself the ULTIMATE SABBATH! He was claiming to be the Messiah and the Sabbath personified. The people knew exactly what he was claiming! They tried to kill Him for it. Can Jesus be any more clear about who He is? The Sabbath is a Person!

I became even more excited as I read the verses and the chapters that followed. Jesus casts out demons, heals sick, cleanses lepers, forgives sins, calls disciples, eats with sinners, all Jubilee activities! Finally, on the second Sabbath, He is going through the grainfields plucking and eating grain when the Pharisees show up. Jesus is doing what is part of the instruction for how people were to eat during the year of Jubilee! Eat out of the fields! As I read all of these things it was like the blinders were falling off of my eyes. I was seeing a Jesus who was clearly claiming to be the Sabbath personified, the Rest Provider, the one who came to fulfill the law.

Finally the story of the transfiguration began to have new significance to me. You remember how Moses and Elijah appeared on top of the mountain with Jesus and He was transfigured. I always thought that this was a little picture of the kingdom, but I missed an important statement being made by God. Moses, to the people of that day, represented the Law, the first five books. Often the law was just referred to as Moses. The ultimate prophet in the old testament era according to the Jews was Elijah. He represented the prophets to them. Then Peter suggests that they all stay there and build shelters to hang out together. He is in essence saying that Elijah and Moses and Jesus are all on the same level. Suddenly “a bright cloud overshadowed them... A voice from the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him!” (Mt 17:5) The disciples are terrified of course, but after a bit look up and what do they see? ONLY JESUS. I had never seen the significance of this before. Jesus and the Law and the Prophets standing side by side. God says, Listen to My Son! It is not the Law and the Prophets AND Jesus. For the Christian era, it is ONLY JESUS. Jesus is in a league all by himself. He is the clearest revelation of God. The Law and the Prophets have their place, but fade into insignificance next to Jesus. This verse helped to underscore in my mind the teaching of Galatians, Romans, and the rest of the epistles, the final authority now is not law or prophets, but Jesus. (See Heb. 1:1-3)

Now, after thorough study in the New Testament I was ready to go back to the Old Testament in my study. I had always thought that Sabbath was established at creation. Since Sabbath was a creation ordinance, then it must be pre-law, and should have a universal significance. So I went to Genesis 2:1-3, where the end of creation is recorded. V.2 says, “and on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

“There it is!” I thought to myself. “Sabbath was established at creation. Since that is true, it must be a forever institution!” The problem that soon became apparent with that quick conclusion was that it jumps to too many assumptions. First, there is no evening and morning mentioned here. All the other creation days had the evening and morning connected to them. Not that this was not a literal day, but there is a continuing aspect of this day that is implied. God intended

that the rest He had established would have a continuing quality. It would have remained as a daily experience had it not been for the incursion of sin. Rest would have been a perpetual reality. Second, the word Sabbath is not mentioned. There is no mention of this being a Sabbath. Third, there is no record that anyone ever kept the Sabbath from that time until God taught the people about it through the manna episode and, of course, Mount Sinai. The marriage institution, on the other hand in Genesis 2:24 clearly establishes marriage as a continuing ordinance. There is much evidence of it being part of the way of life in all the years following. But for the Sabbath there is no mention for 2500 years! What I learned is that the creation ordinance idea has some serious weaknesses. So if I was going to be faithful to what the text actually says, I had to admit that two interpretations are allowed: 1) a creation ordinance of a seventh-day Sabbath, or 2) a completed work and celebration that was intended to effect the world for every day thereafter.

We do not find Sabbath mentioned again until Exodus 16:23. God explains the Sabbath concept to the people of Israel through the manna episode. As I studied, it became evident that the people were unaware of any Sabbath up to this time. They had been given some new commandments such as the sacrifice of the Lamb in Exodus 12, and the institution of the Passover feast in the same time period. They knew about circumcision, but they are now introduced to the Sabbath. The context is clear that the people had to be taught what a Sabbath was.

The Sabbath is later expanded in Exodus 20 8-11 as one of the Ten Commandments . There they were instructed to remember the Sabbath. Some have suggested that this refers to creation establishment. Others that it refers to the manna episode. Either translation is allowed in the text. Notice the ones who are obligated to rest include “the stranger within your gates”, a different group than the “stranger that sojourns among you” in Leviticus 17-18. This command was not for everyone as a creation ordinance might indicate. (See comments on Acts 15 above) Finally in verse 11 it says “for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it Holy.” Now again at first glance this seems to indicate that this was a creation ordinance that had been established at creation. And the text definitely allows that. But it also allows for the other notion that since God is creator you are to worship Him as such. His blessing and sanctification of the seventh day at creation is now, since the manna instruction, being called the Sabbath. The Sabbath part of the institution being later at the manna episode. God’s has the right to demand this of His followers because they are his created beings. Again, two possible interpretations are permissible here; a creation ordinance, or a later establishment by the same creator in the manna incident.

Since either the creation ordinance of the Sabbath or the later ordinance honor the text, I needed to study further to see if the context of the Old Testament gives any clues as to which is correct. What blew me away was the clarity of the other texts on this subject. They state exactly which way to interpret these texts. There is no need for confusion. One thing I have found in my studies, on important issues, God always provides at least three scriptures or more to make sure

we are not led astray.⁵ He does not leave us to guess work or to have to be super smart or gifted to understand what is really important. One text that brought clarification on the issue of whether the Sabbath was a creation ordinance for all mankind, or a specific law for Israel, was Exodus 31:12ff

“And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the CHILDREN OF ISRAEL saying, ‘Surely my Sabbaths you shall keep. For it is a SIGN BETWEEN ME AND YOU throughout YOUR generations that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. You shall keep my Sabbath therefore for it is HOLY TO YOU. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death... Therefore the CHILDREN OF ISRAEL shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout THEIR generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign BETWEEN ME AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ And when He had made an end of speaking with Him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the Two tables of the Testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.⁶

Notice how clear this is. The Sabbath was between God and Israel and was placed on the table of the covenant with that relationship in mind. Deuteronomy 5:2-3 makes the same point.

“The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb, The Lord DID NOT MAKE THIS COVENANT WITH OUR FATHERS BUT WITH US who are standing here today, all of us who are alive.”

The text goes on to reiterate the ten commandments including the 4th, but this time the reason for keeping the Sabbath is because God delivered them from the Egyptians. Clearly a reference to Israel only, and one that was not established before the Exodus, but was a sign of the rest provided by that event. Neh 9:13 says this,

⁵This is one reason the Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgement is so shaky in my opinion. It is based on one text that comes from an obscure passage of apocalyptic literature. It is complicated by the fact that the immediate context does not appear to be talking about a heavenly but an earthly issue. It is connected to other scriptures by the weakest of linguistic ties, and it ignores the actual wording of the evening and morning sacrificial imagery within the text. In order to make the horn power fit the Adventist scenario, one must make this horn grow out of one of the winds rather than the horns of the Grecian empire where it logically fits. The obvious connection to Antiochus Epiphanes is ignored. To base an entire doctrine on such a stretch is highly suspect. There are no biblical scholars outside of Adventism who agree with the SDA interpretation. This ought to throw up a caution sign for making too many dogmatic claims. Essentially the SDA position has one weak text and E.G. White for support.. That doesn't sound like the Bible and the Bible only to me.

⁶See 11 Cor. 3:6-9, and Heb. 8:13

“You came down also on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. YOU MADE KNOWN TO THEM YOUR HOLY SABBATH, and commanded them precepts statutes and laws, by the hand of Moses your servant.”

Ezekiel 20:10-12 says

“Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and SHOWED THEM MY JUDGMENTS. Which if a man does he shall live by them. Moreover I gave THEM My Sabbaths to be a SIGN BETWEEN THEM AND ME that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.”

These scriptures made clear to me when the Sabbath was established. It placed the Sabbath right in the heart of the covenant with Israel and was to be between them and God. It was NOT a creation ordinance binding on all people for all time. This again agreed with what I had learned in the New testament. The entire message of the Bible fits together. The Sabbath was a day established by God as a covenant between Himself and Israel. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and to be our Sabbath. Christians rest in the finished work of Christ as their Sabbath rest. As Children of Abraham, Christians are counted righteous because of their faith like Abraham before the Law or circumcision. The entire biblical picture is in agreement from beginning to end.

Now that the message of the Bible on the Sabbath had been studied and the teaching clear to my mind, there were some sticking points that seemed to contradict this consistent theme. One example was the statement that in the new earth we will be keeping Sabbath. So I went to that passage to read it for myself and found out a few interesting things. One, it says that the celebrations will be “from one NEW MOON to another and from one Sabbath to another.” (Isa. 66:22-23) Does this mean that New Moon festivals should be kept today? Are they still binding? Then I noticed the next couple of verses talk about the inhabitants walking about and encountering the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against the Lord. That didn't sound like the new earth. Then in reading the larger context of the same vision, it says “for the child will die one hundred years old.” (Isa. 65:20) What a strange picture of heaven! The reason it sounds so strange is because the “New Heavens and New Earth” that Isaiah is talking about is not the New Earth of Revelation where “there will be no more death or sorrow or crying.” Instead, it is describing Isaiah's picture of what the earth would be like if Israel had accepted the Messiah and become the center attraction of the world. People would have come to Israel to see what their God had done. They would have joined Israel in worship and God's blessings would have made this “New Jerusalem” the center of the world. This prediction was one of those prophecies that was conditional on the acceptance of the Messiah. Since Israel rejected the Messiah, it was not fulfilled.

Another sticking question for me was Jesus statement telling his disciples to pray that their "flight be not in the winter or on the Sabbath," (Mt 24:20) Doesn't this indicate that the Sabbath

was still to be binding? The answer to that question became clear to me in reading Nehemiah 13 where Nehemiah is instituting some regulations about the business that some were conducting on the Sabbath. Some of the surrounding gentiles were bringing in their wares to sell to the Israelites on the Sabbath. This had been a snare to Israel before, had caused them to turn away from God, and eventually be taken into captivity. So Nehemiah made this regulation that was still in effect in Jesus day: "So it was at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut and charged that they must not be opened 'till after the Sabbath."(Neh. 13:19) In Matthew 24 for Jesus instruction was that the Christians were to be ready to make their escape as soon as they saw the Roman army pull back. This was to be their sign to escape. The Roman army would lift siege only for a short time. The rest of the inhabitants would be thinking that they had given up, and go back to business as usual. But the Christians were to see this as their Que to escape. But they were to pray that it not be winter for obvious reasons, and not on Sabbath, because why? Sabbath would still be a binding institution? No, it was not considered by the Jews that to run from danger or to fight in war was a breaking of the Sabbath command. That was not the issue. The issue was that the gates of the city would be shut for the Sabbath and it would make the Christian escape virtually impossible. Nehemiah's command helped me see how this fit together. Once again, the whole picture made sense.

Another question that I wrestled with concerned the moral requirements for Christians. It seemed to me that the rest of the commandments in the Decalogue are still applicable for Christians, even though Romans and Galatians and the rest of the epistles do teach that we are not under law. The New Testament does encourage morality. Most Christians do emphasize keeping the commandments, all except the fourth. That seemed a little inconsistent to me. But in studying further, the answer came clear as well. Throughout the New Testament application section (post cross) there are restatements of all of the moral oughts of the ten commandment law including some of the other Old Testament laws. However, these restatements NEVER appeal to the law as the reason to observe them, but in every situation the appeal is to Christ. In Corinthians 6:18-20 for example, there is a clear admonition to sexual purity. but it does NOT appeal to law as the reason for it, but rather that we are God's temple and the Spirit of Christ is in us. How could we join Jesus to a prostitute?

The same pattern is found throughout the epistles. Again, I needed to remember that this section of scripture is especially written to APPLY the message of the scriptures to Christians. I was blown away to discover that all of the other nine commandments are restated as important for Christians in relationship with Christ, except one. The Sabbath. The Sabbath is NEVER TAUGHT as a moral ought for Christians. Not once! Instead it is reinterpreted as a daily rest in Jesus as we have seen before. Notice the following summary of commandments restated in the New Testament:

- 1st Worship God only — at least 50 times
- 2nd No Idolatry — 12 times
- 3rd No profanity — 4 times
- 4th Remember Sabbath — not mentioned
- 5th Honor parents — 6 times

- 6th Don't murder — 6 times
- 7th No Adultery — 12 times
- 8th No stealing — 4 times
- 9th No lying — 4 times
- 10th Don't covet — 9 times

If the Adventist position, that the Sabbath will be the ultimate test of all time, that it will be the final test of loyalty, that all who are true followers will be keeping it, and to fail to do so will be to receive the "Mark of the Beast" is true, wouldn't it make sense that God would include it in his list of moral oughts for the Christians repeatedly throughout the New Testament? Wouldn't God warn and re-warn his disciples? Wouldn't Sabbath breaking be listed in the lists of sins that Paul and the others stated and restated so many times in their warnings to the new believers? Why are there no instructions to "Jonas" And "Janeius" Gentile about how to keep the Sabbath? Wouldn't there have been some questions about how to do so in the gentile world? In my many years as an Adventist pastor, one of the most common questions I have been asked by new believers and long term members alike is, "What is OK and what is not OK to do on Sabbath? How can we do this right?" I cannot fathom that there would be NO INSTRUCTION AT ALL on this issue during the Christian church era. The reason is clear. Jesus is our Sabbath. Rest in Him each day, as we come to Him in faith, IS THE SABBATH of the New Testament. There is no other reasonable explanation, in my opinion.⁷

Well, what about Sunday worship? Is this right, wrong, or not an issue? My understanding from my study is that it is not an issue. It is neither right or wrong. It is always right to worship God as often and with association with other believers as possible. In Acts 2:42-47 the early church was in worship everyday. If it were possible to do that such would be ideal. But we do have lives to lead and daily corporate worship becomes impractical. Yet we need to have times for corporate worship to supplement our daily experience. We must not neglect corporate worship. (Heb. 10:25) It is not wrong to worship on Saturday and neither is it wrong to worship

⁷Just where to draw the line on Sabbath keeping has been a problem for many sabbatarians. Many Adventist boarding schools, years ago, did not allow showers to be taken on the Sabbath. I grew up with certain unwritten rules regarding Sabbath observance. It was OK to wade on Sabbath, but not to swim. It was OK to ride bicycles, but not if there was a motor attached. It was OK to play games as long as "Bible" was part of the name. A Sabbath's day's journey for us was the distance a person could travel on one tank of gas without refilling on the holy day. A person could eat in the campmeeting cafeteria as long as Adventist script had been purchased the day before. The problem is clear. If the Old Testament law is still binding, then what business do we have allowing people to carry burdens, or travel, or prepare meals, or make all of these sub-rules? Is that any different than what the rabbis did with their 600+ Sabbath regulations? On the other hand, if the New Testament has reinterpreted these things in Christ, why do we not take what it says to it's full and biblical conclusion and stop making Sabbath an issue at all? Should we not focus on Jesus who is our true Sabbath? Otherwise, are we not guilty of a Neo-legalism with just another set of rules that WE made up? The New Testament silence on the issue of how to keep Sabbath makes a powerful statement that God did not intend for His followers to go down that road. (See Gal. 5:1)

on Sunday, or Wednesday or any other day! Keeping a Sabbath for reflection and spiritual growth is healthy and should be encouraged. But the message of the New Testament, and the rest of the Bible makes it clear that for Christians, the day of the week this takes place, if at all, should NOT be binding or mandated.

It was interesting for me to discover the early church process with this. In an exhaustive study on the issue of Sabbath to Sunday, D.A. Carson, edits a book called *From Sabbath To The Lord's Day*.⁸ This book is a highly technical work that examines the early church fathers and their views about Sabbath and Sunday. From 100 ad on, the earliest Christians were unanimously meeting on Sunday. This was a universal practice among Christians. No one considered it a Sabbath. But everyone met on that day. This is much earlier than Adventists have taught. What is more, the fact that this was unanimous among the disciples of the Apostles, it is unthinkable that this could have happened without having been the general practice during the Apostolic era. Again I want to say that the early Christians thought it was a good day to meet because of the resurrection, but they did NOT associate it with a change of the Sabbath. Some of these Christians continued meet on Sabbath. Mostly the Jewish ones. Others, mostly Gentiles, did not. They gave the reasons that we have discussed earlier. Clearly they understood the teachings of Paul and the rest of the Bible as we have just studied. The Sabbath was an OK option, but not binding on Christians. However, there was a need to gather for worship. Because many of the Jewish Christians would still attend synagogue on the Sabbath, there was a need to have another time when Christians could gather for their own private meetings. This became Sunday, which they began to call the Lord's Day. Our first record of this reference was in 107 ad. That is only 11 years from the time of John's reference to the Lord's day in Revelation 1:10. It is quite probable that John was referring to Sunday when he mentioned that day. Not because of any sacredness attached to it, but because it was the common day of meeting for Christians.

The early Christians had some sentimental attachment to the first day of the week as well. Not only did the Lord rise on that day, but of the seven appearances of Jesus to his disciples, five of these were on the first day, and in the other appearances, there is not a specific mention of which day. Also that year, the feast of Pentecost was on the first day of the week. The Christian church was born on a Sunday. But this did NOT mean they attached sacredness or Sabbath qualities to that day. There were no appeals to the Ten Commandments attached to Sunday. Even much later when Constantine made the first Sunday Law, it was just a law to forbid work on that day. It was welcomed by Christians and Pagans alike as a break from work. It made worship more convenient, but it was not a law based on Sabbath law at all. In fact, the farmers were exempt. They could continue their work. This of course was not allowed in Sabbath law of the Old Testament.

⁸D.A. Carson, *From Sabbath to the Lord's day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological investigation* (Eugene OR, 1999)

There was some anti-Jewish sentiment at that time. Some have suggested that since the Jews were in trouble with the government, the Christians tried to distance themselves from the Jews by getting away from Sabbath so as to avoid persecution. But the records from that era do not indicate a people who did anything because they were trying to avoid persecution for the cause of Christ. The examples are myriad of Christians standing boldly for their faith in spite of the threat of death. If this had been a conviction for them they would have stood for it. But they were NOT convicted about the Sabbath as is clearly seen in their literature.

It was not until Augustine in the fifth century that some connection began to be made between the Ten Commandments and Sunday. Even then the connection was loose. The day-ness of Sabbath was considered ceremonial. This view was made more prominent by Thomas Aquinas in the later centuries. The reformers, Calvin and Luther, were careful to state that the Sabbath was not binding on Christians, but they saw merit in taking a day for rest and worship. It was not until the English reformation that the Decalogue Sabbath began to truly be pushed. The chief proponents of this were the Puritans. They began to teach the Sabbath (Although they called Sunday the Sabbath) was not abolished and they made strict rules to follow according to the Old Testament regulations. This of course effected the other English groups like the Methodists, and the Baptists. Many of these groups came to America and New England became noted for strict Sabbath (Sunday) observance. It was there, that one group, the Seventh-day Baptists took it a step further and started keeping Saturday as the Sabbath. If the Old Testament Sabbath is binding on Christians, they reasoned, we had better keep the right day also. It was the Seventh-day Baptists that influenced Joseph Bates, who in turn influenced E. G. White, and Seventh-day Adventism was born. Adventists are still primarily arguing with the "Puritans" over which day is the real Sabbath, rather than whether or not this is an issue in the New Testament for Christians. In arguing about which day is the Sabbath, the message of scripture and the message the early church had clearly in mind, has been missed altogether.

I continued to pray in earnest about these things. Paula and I made this a subject of great soul searching and continued research. The whole study hit me so hard that I would wake up in the middle of the night and call out to God. "Lord, please do not let me be deceived. I want to be your faithful follower." Every time, after much prayer and wrestling with God, the scriptures would come to my mind with even greater clarity. I would hang onto Luke 11:11-13 over and over, day after day. Jesus says when we ask for the Holy Spirit He will give Him to us, not deception. Many times I would agonize with God and pray that He would lay me to rest rather than let me be deceived or let me dishonor His cause. But The lord would keep sending me reassurance through His promises and His word. Galatians 5:1 Would come to my mind with great clarity, "Stand firm therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." I would come out of those times refreshed, filled with the Spirit of God, and resting in Jesus my Sabbath. The words of the Bible came to life for me. I understood those sections of the Bible that I had always had to explain away. The veil had fallen from my eyes.

Meanwhile Paula was coming to the same conclusions on her own. We knew that God was calling us to a deeper walk with Him that could involve stepping out of all that means security

for us. We'd thought at first that God might want us to remain in the church and work for change. However, as we prayed more and more we became uncomfortable with that option. We are a team that God has uniquely gifted to reach the unchurched. In addition we have been given leadership and teaching gifts. To know the truth, and just sit on it and hope for change did not seem to fit the way God wired us. We were willing to do so however. It sure would be less traumatic. The other side of the issue for me was the responsibility I have to teach the truth. I am a flawed human being, with so many frailties, but God is doing a great work in my heart. I cannot live a double life. I am not an eloquent speaker nor a flashy personality. The only thing I have going for me is my convictions and my love for Jesus. If I cannot speak from the core of my experience with Jesus, I am nothing.

Paula and I also feel that it would be wrong to continue to represent an organization that we no longer believe represents truth. To continue to serve in it would be to lend credibility to it's claims. We have many wonderful friends in the Adventist church. We are grateful for our conference president and our staff, elders, volunteers, and so many others who have supported us and gone out on a limb to help us try to build a church for a new generation. We do not want to hurt them or the Foster church that we love so much and have laid down our very lives for over the past eight years. But we must follow the Lord in this thing. We recognize that there will be those who strongly disagree with our understanding of scripture and our sense of calling. But we are not responsible to them. We are responsible to God.

While the implications of these discoveries are frightening, there is also a sense of eager anticipation looking forward to what God has planned for us. We are being asked to live on the ragged edge of faith. We must trust in God's promises as never before. We truly are learning to live by faith and rest in Jesus our Lord and our Friend. For us, this is not just theory, but it is actual faith experience. It is trust in God's word and reliance on Him and Him alone. This is Sabbath rest on a daily basis. We are grateful that God has entrusted us with His truth and allowed us to put Him to the test. Despite our fears, we are confident of the future. Where God leads, He provides.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

www.damascus.com Tape series called "The Sabbath in Christ"

www.ellenwhite.org Download material on Ellen White

www.graceplace.org Papers entitled "New Covenant Christians" and "Is Sabbath Observance Required..."

www.ratzlaf.com Books called "The Sabbath in Crisis" and "Sabbath to the Lord's Day"

