

Are Adventists Legalists?

THE CHARGE is repeatedly and militantly brought against us as Seventh day Adventists that we are legalists. In other words, that we depend on a keeping of the law instead of on the keeping power of Christ, and thus point men to the law rather than to Christ.

Now, this is a grave charge indeed. If it be true that we substitute law for grace and our own frail powers for the divine power promised by Christ, then we are entitled only to condemnation by all who love our Lord and Savior. In fact, if we substitute the law for Christ we are not really Christians

Do we plead guilty to such charge? We do not. With all the vehemence at our command we declare the charge to be false and unfounded. We insist that no fair reading of our teachings on the law warrants any indictment of us as legalists. The only way that an appearance of a case against Adventists has been produced is by taking stray passages here and there from the rather numerous denominational works and giving to them an interpretation wholly unwarranted and alien to the general tenor of Adventist writings on the subject.

What our critics do not seem to realize is that by such a method of presenting evidence the Bible writers may also be proved legalists. James declares, "By works a man is justified, and not by faith only." James 2:24. What a dreadful legalist was James! If Adventists belong outside the pale of Christendom, then where does James belong? In all our history we have never written anything quite so vigorous as this in behalf of good works. Or what shall we say of the answer that our Lord gave to the rich young man who asked of Him the way to life eternal: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments"? Matt. 19:17.

But let us take the possibilities of stray passages a little further. By picking out the desired texts our critics could prove various Bible writers to be not only legalists but opponents of all sound religion. Does not Paul make reference to being baptized for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29)? And have not his words been plausibly used by those who believe in the efficacy of prayers for the dead? Does not Isaiah attribute to God the declaration, "I make peace, and create evil"? Isa. 45:7. And have not skeptics pointed to Isaiah's statement in scorn? Again, what shall we say of our Lord's word to His apostles: "Who so ever sins you remit, they are remitted"? John 20:23. Do not Roman Catholics quote this text with great plausibility and persuasiveness in behalf of the doctrine of priestly absolution?

Now, in their zeal to ferret out false doctrine, do our critics indict these Bible authors? For illustration, do they indict James? Why let him escape the denunciation that ought to come upon the head of all legalists? Luther did not. The great Reformer, who was dazzled by the light of the doctrine of justification by faith, could see in the epistle of James only a contradiction of that doctrine and wished to dismiss the letter as "an epistle of straw." Hence, our critics would have good Protestant precedent for their attack on James.

Inconsistent Critics

But they are not consistent. They refuse to attack any Bible writer in regard to particular passages that might seem to contradict the main tenor of Scripture and the beliefs of Christians. When skeptics point to apparently questionable texts and alleged contradictions, our critics, who generally belong to the conservative wing of Christendom, are the most vehement in crying out against what they declare are the unfair tactics of skeptics in lifting stray passages out of their context. They insist that a particular text in question shall be understood in the setting of all the Scriptures, and that other and clearer texts shall be the guide for interpreting a text that seems obscure or contradictory to the main teachings of the Bible.

No Attack on James

Specifically, our critics refuse to indict James. They do not think that he wrote an epistle of straw. They would not thus attack a part of the canon of Holy Scripture. They would be horrified at the thought. If anything, they would attack Luther, or perhaps we should say they would explain away Luther's remark on the ground that he was just coming out of the darkness of Catholicism. And had not yet discovered the higher harmony that exists between apparently contradictory Scriptures on the important subject of faith and good works.

And of course our critics would be right in taking that position with regard to the Scriptures in general and the Epistle of James in particular. Picking out stray passages in the Bible is no proper way to discover the true teachings of the Bible. And the person who does this and who goes on from this to pit one text against another, is rightly open to grave suspicion that he is approaching the Scriptures from a prejudiced viewpoint, seeking to make out a case against them.

If all this be true as regards the writings of the Scriptures, and it is then why is it not also true

as regards other writings? It is. Including even the writings of Seventh day Adventists? Why not? But evidently our critics are not willing to concede this principle in relation to Adventist writings. If they did they would immediately have to withdraw all the charges they have made against us as legalists.

Let Us Examine the Record

With no irreverence to the Bible writers, it may be stated as a simple matter of fact that it would be much easier for Seventh day Adventists to prove, in terms of their writings, that they believe wholly and only in the unmerited grace of Christ for their salvation, than for James to do so from his writings. And why? Because it probably never occurred to James, after he had written his most helpful, practical epistle, to follow it with any general statement of belief, particularly on the matter of law and grace, in order to escape misunderstanding. He took for granted that the Christian believers, to whom had been preached the grace of Christ, would interpret his epistle aright. God gave him words to say in the epistle regarding the place of works, and he let the matter stand at that.

Seventh day Adventists have not done this. We have taken care to place ourselves on record in a formal way regarding our belief as to law and grace, along with our belief on other doctrines. Besides, different Adventist authors have written whole books devoted to the theme. Those books set forth the truth that the Christian is wholly dependent on Christ. These works are easily available to all. Surely our critics must have found them, for they give evidence of having combed Adventist works with sedulous care in order to come up with a stray phrase here and there from them.

Surely they must have seen the book *Steps to Christ*, by Mrs. E. G. White, a book that has had probably a larger circulation than almost any other of our works. And it is Mrs. White that our critics desire, if possible, to quote, because they know that we view her as speaking with authority for us. How anyone could frame more clearly the doctrine of complete dependence upon Christ for forgiveness of past sins and for strength to lead a godly life until the day of our Lord's return than Mrs. White has framed in that book, we know not. This much we do know; our critics, in all their writings, have never outdone this book in ascribing to Christ all honor, all power, as the only source of the sinner's deliverance from sin and the Christian's growth in grace.

Mrs. White's Life of Christ

Or take, for illustration, another book by Mrs. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*. In which she tells the story of our Lord's life on earth, of His dying for our sins, of His being raised again for our justification, and of His ascending to heaven above to minister on our behalf at the right hand of God. Have any of our critics written a work that raises Christ to greater heights or makes Him more indispensable to the sinner and to the saint in the plan of salvation than has this work? The answer is No. We say this, not out of any disparagement of the writings of our critics, but out of a calm conviction that they simply have not attained unto the heights of exultant declaration of Christ's place in the plan of salvation that Mrs. White has attained.

But Mrs. White is not the only Adventist writer on this subject. Many of our authors have written on it. And numerous times they have taken occasion to refute the false charges that we are legalists. They have been explicit in their declarations that we rely wholly and only on Christ for our salvation. It would take altogether too much space to cite the array of references that could here be given, and surely there is no need, for again we say, our critics could not have failed to find at least a portion of these writings and these explicit statements in combing our works. However, in order to keep the record straight, here are a few typical statements from Adventist authors who have also been leaders in the denomination, and thus may rightly be viewed as reflecting the theological views of the denomination.

Testimony of Various Leaders

These statements might be viewed in the form of testimony offered by witnesses on a question at issue. The question is, What do Adventists believe to be the means of salvation? A. G. Daniells, who served as president of the General Conference for twenty-one years, will be the first to testify. He wrote a book entitled *Christ Our Righteousness*. Following are typical sentences:

"It is through faith in the blood of Christ that all the sins of the believer are canceled and the righteousness of God is put in their place to the believer's account.... He yields, repents, confesses, and by faith claims Christ as his Savior. The instant that is done, he is accepted as a child of God. His sins are all forgiven, his guilt is canceled, he is accounted righteous, and stands approved, justified, before the divine law. And this amazing, miraculous change may take place in one short hour. This is righteousness by faith." - Pages 22, 23.

Next is the testimony of William A. Spicer, who, first as secretary and then as president of the General Conference, served in key places in the church for many, many years. Speaking of the white

raiment mentioned in the book of the Revelation, he says:

"This white raiment is the righteousness of Christ, received by faith. Not by any works that we can do to cleanse ourselves from sin, but by His own grace He cleanses us, and clothes us with His own righteousness." - Beacon Lights of Prophecy, p. 193.

Take now the testimony of Charles H. Watson, who was president of the General Conference for six years:

"He [Paul] also makes clear that a man, upon repentance and faith in Christ, pleading the Savior's blood for the remission of his sins, and before he has wrought a single act of obedience to the law, is justified by his faith....

"This righteousness is a-gift. We cannot earn it. We cannot claim it by any natural right that we have, but, thank God, we can accept it in all its blessed fullness by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus. There is absolutely no doubt that the blood of the atonement is the means by which faith secures justification." - The Atoning Work of Christ, pp. 46-48.

Here is the testimony of William H. Branson, who has long held key administrative positions in the denomination and who is now its president:

"We are not asked to try to win salvation by some effort on our part but to accept it as a gift from God. We are not saved by anything we may do for God but by what He does for us. Jesus saves, and apart from Him there is no salvation." -How Men Are Saved, p. 27.

And here is the testimony of Francis M. Wilcox, for more than thirty years editor of The Review and Herald, which is the general church paper of Seventh day Adventists:

"To justify is to make righteous, to make equal to the divine standard. As the penitent confesses his sins and lays hold of Christ's atoning sacrifice in his behalf, there is imputed to him. For all his past life, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that when God looks upon the past years of unrighteousness, He sees no longer a life filled with crime and iniquity. But He sees the spotless life of the Son of God that has been put in the place of the life of the believer. Thus the man stands in God's sight as though he had never committed iniquity."-Review and Herald, Centennial Issue, Oct. 19, 1944, pp. 15, 16.

For good measure here is one further quotation. This from Harold M. S. Richards, radio preacher of the Voice of Prophecy program, a nationwide broadcast that has been conducted for years under the sponsorship of the Seventh day Adventist denomination:

"Christ died for us; Christ lives in us by His Spirit. So we belong to Him, and our salvation depends upon Him-wholly and entirely. Our obedience to God's law, then, is not to be saved, but because we are saved. It is not of our doing, but of His doing. 'Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God bath before ordained that we should walk in them.' Eph. 2:9, 10."-Radio Script, "The Law and the Gospel," p. 3, broadcast Dec. 9, 1945, over Mutual network.

These testimonies hardly call for comment, unless it be the inquiry: Who is better qualified to state what Adventists believe these witnesses or our critics?

Official Statement of Belief

But there is even more impressive and if possible more unequivocal testimony that can be presented than that of these individual leaders and spokesmen for Seventh day Adventists. There is the Statement of Belief that appears in the official Yearbook of the denomination. Adventists have never sought to formulate a creed in the historic meaning of that word. We have hesitated to crystallize in too rigid a form our understanding of the Scriptures, lest we fall into the error of refusing to go beyond our first formulated creed to any better, clearer, or more correct understanding of the Scriptures.

But we have on occasions set forth what we describe as a Statement of Belief. There have been at least two such prepared during the history of this denomination. They are in no essential point contrary one to the other. They differ rather in phrasing and thus in length. The latter one, which has appeared in the official Yearbook for a number of years, and which is found unchanged in the latest edition, for all to read, devotes sections 3-8 to the subject of Christ and the sinner, the law and grace. As those sections state, we believe-

"3. That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father. While retaining His divine nature He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, lived on the earth as a man, exemplified in His life as our Example the principles of righteousness. Attested His relationship to God by many mighty miracles, died for our sins on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended to the Father, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. John 1: 1,14; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1,2; 4:14-16; 7:25.

"4. That every person in order to obtain salvation must experience the new birth; that this

comprises an entire transformation of life and character by the re-creative power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. John 3:16; Matt. 18:3; Acts 2:37-39.

"S. That baptism is an ordinance of the Christian church and should follow repentance and forgiveness of sins. By its observance faith is shown in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. That the proper form of baptism is by immersion. Rom. 6:1-6; Acts 16:30-33.

"6. That the will of God as it relates to moral conduct is comprehended in His law of Ten Commandments; that these are great moral, unchangeable precepts, binding upon all men, in every age. Ex. 20:1-17.

"7. That the fourth commandment of this unchangeable law requires the observance of the seventh day Sabbath. This holy institution is at the same time a memorial of creation and a sign of sanctification, a sign of the believer's rest from his own works of sin, and his entrance into the rest of soul which Jesus promises to those who come to Him. Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; 31:12-17; Heb. 4:1-10.

"8. That the law of Ten Commandments points out sin, the penalty of which is death. The law cannot save the transgressor from his sin, nor impart power to keep him from sinning. In infinite love and mercy, God provides a way whereby this may be done. He furnishes a substitute, even Christ the Righteous One, to die in man's stead, making 'Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' 2 Cor. 5:21. That one is justified, not by obedience to the law, but by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. By accepting Christ, man is reconciled to God, justified by His blood for the sins of the past, and saved from the power of sin by His indwelling life. Thus the gospel becomes 'the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.' Rom. 1:16. This experience is wrought by the divine agency of the Holy Spirit, who convicts of sin and leads to the Sin-Bearer, inducting the believer into the new-covenant relationship, where the law of God is written on his heart, and through the enabling power of the indwelling Christ, his life is brought into conformity to the divine precepts. The honor and merit of this wonderful transformation belong wholly to Christ. 1 John 2:1,2; 3:4; Rom. 3:20; 5:8-10; 7:7; Eph. 2:8-10; 3:17; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 8:8-12."-Yearbook of the Seventh day Adventist Denomination, 1946, p. 4.

The Crux of the Matter

Here, then, is what we believe on the subject of law and grace, Christ and the sinner, as set forth in the writings of various of our leaders and in our Statement of Belief. In the latter we have set forth, even as other churches have set forth in their creeds, our view on this doctrine of the law in the most explicit and the most authoritative way that it is possible for us to do. And ought we not to be credited with knowing what we believe? That is finally the crux of the matter. That is the heart of the controversy that we have with our critics who accuse us of legalism.

We are certain that our critics would rise up in wrath if we charged that they really did not know what they believed, that they could not safely be allowed to interpret their own writings and resolve apparent contradictions in them. Or that a statement of belief they might formulate should not be taken at face value but should be ignored in favor of stray passages in the writings of different members of their religious persuasion. If we made such a charge against them they would consider it an insult to their intelligence, an indictment of their honesty, an accusation of duplicity and hypocrisy. And well they might.

But we bring no such charge against them. We believe that our critics are able to state what their beliefs are. We grant that they should be allowed to harmonize any apparent contradictions in other of their writings with the formal, carefully phrased words in their official statement of doctrine. We would do this for any critic, any opponent. We know that the limitations of language are such that it is easily possible to create apparent contradictions where no real contradictions exist, and to make an emphasis on one doctrine appear to be a denial of another.

When we want to know what any religious body believes, we seek first to discover whether they have prepared a formal statement of belief, and if so we take that as being their official belief on doctrine. And why not? What would be the point to any religious body's formulating a creed unless it would be accepted by those who read it as being a correct statement of the doctrinal views of that religious body?

Now what we concede to others, our critics included, we claim also for ourselves. Why not? Are we less able to express our thoughts in a formal statement of belief than are all other Christian people? Do we, in contrast to all other Christian bodies, not really know what we believe and hence use words with no true meaning? Or is it possible that our critics would claim that they need not concede to us what we willingly concede to them and to all others, namely that their official statements of belief are the honest expression of their doctrines. Unless they are prepared to set forth and support the charge that we employ duplicity in words, they have no defense whatever for the tactics they follow in ignoring our Statement of Belief and citing stray passages here and there in our writings to prove a case

against us.

But the charge that either we do not know what we mean by what we say or we conceal our meanings, would be a new argument indeed. We hardly think that at this late date our critics will seek to prove true such a monstrous charge as this. If the star of Adventism had appeared in the religious sky only yesterday, bursting suddenly on the vision of men with blinding light, our critics might plausibly say that Adventism was not really what it appeared to be. That the statements of its spokesmen needed to be tested against time and the outworking of the beliefs. But Adventism did not burst suddenly upon the sight of men just yesterday. Instead, it rose slowly from the New England horizon, casting ever longer rays as the years have rolled on, until today the light of Advent teachings shines in every land. We have been preaching, writing, conducting church services, in an increasing number of languages for a century. The real meaning of our teachings has been revealed in our religious services week by week, and in the lives of our members day by day, for three generations.

And what do these years reveal? Do they reveal instances of Seventh day Adventist ministers conducting revival services in the evangelistic sense of the word, calling on men to accept Christ? Yes. In our churches and in our annual camp meetings, year after year, appeals are made directly to the hearts of men and women, young and old, to accept Jesus Christ and to accept Him as their only Savior from sin and their only spiritual Sustainer and Source of life for the future. Strange that our critics never seem to be aware of these revival services we conduct. There is nothing secret about them. Public notices in the press invite all to come to our large camp meetings. If we conducted these revival services on a legalistic basis, if we failed to exalt Jesus Christ, is it reasonable to believe that our critics would have overlooked this contrast?

Adventist Pastoral Visitation

And what have Adventist pastors done through the years when visiting church members? Have they carried along a scroll of the Ten Commandments and consumed the time of the pastoral visit in asking the family whether they have kept the law, assuring them that if they will keep on trying they will probably succeed in keeping those commands, but that if they fail they will be in a very sad state? This question is not posed to provoke a smile from our Adventist readers. The matter is too serious for that.

Yes, what do Adventist pastors say or do when they visit the homes of their church members? Speaking personally, I have never taken a scroll of the law to any home, nor pleaded with parishioners to try harder to keep the law, nor warned them of the terrors of ultimate hell-fire if they failed. I rather took for granted that those who have accepted Christ have the law written in their hearts, which is the promise of the new covenant. Presuming this,

I spent my time in talking of the promises of God, the goodness of the Lord, His forgiving grace for sins confessed, His proffered power for victory in the future. And I ended each pastoral visit with a prayer to God through Jesus Christ, laying claim to all these promises, most particularly to the promise that Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith and live out through us all the principles of heaven, including all His divine laws.

And has there been anything unusual in my pastoral visitation? No. I have done simply what every other Adventist minister does. Would our critics suggest some other course for us to follow in order to be in harmony with good Christian practices and beliefs? I think not.

Our Attack on Enslaving Habits

And what do we say to someone who comes to us for freedom from slavery to an evil habit like drink or tobacco? Do we simply urge him to try to keep the law of God, adding that we trust he will secure victory over his evil habit, but that if he fails there is only damnation ahead for him? Is it possible that we say such a thing as this? Well, our critics charge that we are legalists; hence, this is what we should be expected to say. But do we really? No! We point the poor slave of evil habits to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To whom else could we point him? And we pray for his deliverance through Christ.

Now, it is a fact that tens of thousands of those who seek admittance to the Adventist Church are troubled with some such habit as tobacco or liquor. Yet they all secure victory over these habits, for no Seventh day Adventist smokes or drinks. Here, then, is an amazing fact. The habits of smoking and drinking have a fearful grip on most of their devotees, as many of them can testify. Yet those coming into the Adventist Church gain complete and generally rather sudden victory over these habits. Have Seventh day Adventists found an immediate and ever-dependable source of power that other Christian people through all the years have not known?

But why press this point further? Is it not evident that we have in this amazing phenomenon of a whole membership free from the enslaving habits of drink and tobacco, and even worse habits in

heathen lands, the clearest proofs that Adventists rely on the one and only Source of help, Jesus Christ our Lord?

Why Not Take a Poll?

Here is a suggestion for you who are critics, a suggestion which, if followed out, could once and for all settle this question of whether Adventists are legalists or not. Here is a chance for you to put your charge to an honest test. Take a poll of a cross section of the rank and file of Seventh day Adventist laymen. Exclude all Adventist preachers, who according to you either do not know what they preach and teach or else have a conspiracy to conceal the meaning of their teachings. Go instead to the homes of humble laymen, who must seek to make religion work in their everyday lives, and whose sincerity and loyalty to Seventh day Adventist beliefs is evidenced by their amazing liberality, which is probably the highest in the religious world.

Go with your notebook in hand and ask those laymen: "Do you rely on the keeping of the law to save you?" "Do you turn your back on Christ as the one and only Savior from past sins and the only Source of power for holy living?" Or ask any variation of these questions in order to make sure that you are framing to your satisfaction your charge that Adventists are legalists.

It is clear what the answer would be. First, there would be a look of bewilderment, then amazement, then indignation, followed probably either by a vehement denial or else a vigorous inquiry as to how you ever came to ask such a question. This would be the response whether the question was asked of an Adventist layman in America, in China, in Africa, or in the islands of the sea.

Of course our critics may wish to challenge this statement, but we shall not listen to them until they have produced the findings from their poll of Adventist homes. We know they will not risk such a poll.

On the other hand, they will hardly attempt to minimize the force of this suggestion of a poll by declaring that Adventist laymen do not really know what their denomination teaches. It is no exaggeration to state that the average Seventh day Adventist probably has more of his church's literature in his home than members of any other Protestant body. And if our critics doubt whether he knows what Adventists believe, it must be because they have never given him an opportunity to set forth those beliefs!

Now, here is a singular phenomenon. The ordinary Adventist is layman who listens to his pastor week by week and who reads Adventist literature constantly, fails entirely to discover the allegedly Christ-denying character of Adventist theology. And hence he prays to God through Christ daily and relies on the saving grace of his Lord for holy living and victory over temptation. Truly a phenomenon!

Yes, We Magnify the Law

At this point our critics may say defensively: "But you Seventh day Adventists have to admit you preach the law. You weave it into your whole theology in such a way that the reader meets it repeatedly. You preach on it in your lectures to the public. You extol the law. You magnify it. You even say Christians should keep the law."

Strictly speaking, it is sufficient to say in reply that whatever we may write or preach about the law, our church members who listen to such preaching return home to rely wholly on Christ. Therefore our law preaching cannot be displacing Christ. Furthermore, what we weave into our writings and sermons concerning the law is rightly to be understood in terms of our formal statement of belief.

But let us examine this statement of our critics a little further. Yes, we weave the law all through our theology. So does the Bible, from first to last. The Old Testament says much about the law and obedience to it. Everyone grants that. The New Testament also says much about obedience to the commandments of God. Indeed, the very last book of the Bible describes the company of those ready for the second coming of Christ as men and women who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Rev. 14:12. And in the version of the Bible which all of us have read from childhood, there is found in the last chapter, almost as a closing benediction to Scripture, this blessing. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. 22:14.

The Apostles Extolled the Law

Yes, we extol the law. We magnify it. But so did the holy apostles and so did our Lord. Paul declared, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. . . . For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." Rom. 7:12, 14.

Wrote the apostle John: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love

God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:2, 3.

Of Christ the prophet Isaiah foretold:

"The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable." Isa. 42:21.

The fulfillment of this prophecy we find most clearly in Christ's sermon on the mount, in which He showed how comprehensive are the commandments against murder and adultery.

Yes, we extol the law, we magnify it, believing that we have every Scriptural precedent for so doing. Indeed, we would magnify it in the very words of Scripture. Nor have we been unique in this matter. We cannot claim any distinction by comparison with great Protestant bodies in this matter of exalting the law of God. The person who reads the creeds of the great Protestant bodies would almost conclude at times that Adventists have been outdone by them in this matter of vigorous declarations concerning the significance of the law of God. But our critics, in charging us with legalism, have clearly sought to imply, when they have not openly charged, that our belief on the law is an unorthodox one, alien to the belief held by the great body of Protestant Christians. But reference to the preceding chapter, "The Law of God in Church Creeds," will reveal that this is not so.

In What Way Do We Differ?

Will our critics please lay alongside the Protestant confessions of faith, the formal Adventist statement on law and grace that was quoted from the Adventist Yearbook, and tell us in what way our statement differs from the classic creedal declarations of Protestantism? We are unable to discover any difference in spirit or in doctrine taught.

More than that, we are unable to discover any practical difference between our view of the law and that of present-day spokesmen for leading Protestant bodies. In the year 1932 the International Uniform Sunday School Lessons dealt with the subject of the Ten Commandments on the Sundays of August 7 and 14. Various church papers carried these lessons and offered their own comments on them. But those comments sound wholly alien to the statements made concerning the Ten Commandments by our critics, who declare that the law has been abolished, and the Adventists are legalists.

Sunday School Times Testifies

For example, here is what The Sunday School Times said in part in its comment on the Sunday school lessons on the Ten Commandments:

"To know God is to love God. The commandments were given that men might know Jehovah God, the God of love and the God of holiness. To love God is to obey Him. God's law is an expression of God's love. The fearful thunders and fire and shaking of Sinai', so dreadful that Moses said, 'I exceedingly fear and quake' (Heb. 12:21), were to reveal the greatness and glory of God, that they might truly fear and reverence Him.... The law is spiritual, and can be kept only in spirit and in truth. Israel 'continued not' in this covenant, and God made a new covenant, not changing the laws, but blotting out their sins, and writing these same laws on their heart. Heb. 8:8-13. To have faith in the God of mercy and love is to have the righteousness of Abraham, and of Moses, and the heart of love to God to keep these commandments, by His grace." - July 23, 1932.

Presbyterian Paper Speaks

In The Presbyterian is found this comment:

"The Ten Commandments are not only precepts of God, but also a description of the nature of God, and His desire for man, that man may be like God. The Lord Jehovah, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the kind of Deity described in these ten words, or oracles, or commandments. Behind them stands the Being of God, and preliminary to them stands the exodus, the Passover, the remembrance. Paul recognized the underlying connection between law and grace when he wrote: 'I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' Rom. 12: 1. The word 'therefore' looks backward at the great chapters before the twelfth. The law is a paragraph in a covenant of grace. It is indeed a 'law of liberty.' "-July 28, 1932.

The Watchman-Examiner, one of the most influential weeklies in the Baptist denomination, contains in its comments on the Sunday school lessons this statement:

-Christ taught His disciples, and all who followed His teachings, that we may have eternal life by keeping perfectly the law as given by God on Sinai, and by loving Him who is the embodiment and the fulfillment of that law." - August 4, 1932.

The Moody Monthly Testifies

Church papers contain many statements on the law, in addition to those quoted in connection with the Sunday school lessons. Take, for example, a series of articles that was printed in the Moody Bible Institute Monthly under the head "Are Christians Freed From the Law?" The series begins with various definitions of law and presents three distinct codes: "the civil law," "the ceremonial law," and "the moral law." Focusing on the moral law, the writer of the series says in his first article, "Let us now see how the moral law is emphasized, enlarged, and enforced in all its details in the New Testament." He shows how Christ and the apostles dealt with it:

"So far from annulling any of the Ten Commandments, He [Christ] amplified their scope, teaching that an angry thought or bitter word violated the sixth, and a lustful look the seventh...."

"The teaching of the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is even more emphatic and explicit concerning the scope and obligations of the moral law." - October, 1933.

Then follows a list of New Testament references to show how the apostles honored each of the Ten Commandments.

The second article deals with the "relationship between the law and the gospel," and "the Christian's true position with regard to the law of God as revealed on Sinai and his plain duty concerning it." The author explains immediately that "we must distinguish carefully and clearly between its two chief parts, the ceremonial and the moral law." A little further on he declares, "Christians are utterly to discard reliance on their observance of the moral law as any means of their justification." But he adds shortly:

"Christians are carefully to observe the moral law as the rule and method of their sanctification, and the guide of their new life.... The fact of their redemption does not do away with the necessity of their obedience; it only makes the obligation stronger, and heightens their responsibility." - November, 1933.

Sunday School Times Again

An editorial in The Sunday School Times entitled "Are Christians Under the Law?" sets forth these clear distinctions between ceremonial and moral codes:

"Christ fulfilled and thereby canceled forever every jot and tittle of the Ceremonial Law. The Moral Law, which was given to Moses by God on the two tables of stone.... Christ found overlaid with traditional, legalistic rules and observances of merit-seeking. He rebuked the sham and corruption of this false system, and by His teaching and example canceled these 'commandments of men.' . . ."

"Paul's argument against 'the law' was aimed at this rabbinical code; and at the continuance of the ceremonial law which Christ's redemptive work had canceled." - April 21, 1934.

Continuing the theme in the next week's issue, The Sunday School Times declares:

"While obedience without the impulsion of love is servility, love that does not issue in obedience is merely nominal. 'He that says, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (1 John 2:4).

"Love and obedience are interchangeable, and incontrovertible ground of our assurance: 'Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.' "-April 28, 1934.

Our One Distinctive View on the Law

There is really only one difference between us and Protestants in general regarding the law. We understand the fourth commandment differently. We believe that the phrase the seventh day means the seventh day of the weekly cycle. And so did everyone else, until the end of the sixteenth century, when Nicholas Bowncle developed the idea that the phrase meant simply one day in seven, and thus provided Puritan reformers with an apparent Scriptural support for Sunday keeping. (See chapter 7) If our critics wish to prefer charges against us for failure to adopt a relatively new interpretation of a Scriptural phrase, we are ready to answer the charge with this simple inquiry. Why should we be asked to accept a new interpretation when the holy prophets and the apostles all understood the words the seventh day to mean the seventh day of the week? The holy women who rested on the day between crucifixion Friday and resurrection Sunday "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment." Luke 23:56.

But even though our critics have to agree that our interpretation is anchored to history and the prophets, they seem still to be sure there must be something spiritually off-color, legalistic, in our keeping of the seventh day of the week. And particularly in our calling upon others to keep the seventh day Sabbath. We may make impassioned appeal to the licentious man to flee from the wrath to come upon the head of all who violate the seventh command. We may do the same in regard to the thief, the liar, the murderer, the covetous man, the parent-dishonoring child, the blasphemer, and the idolater. To each we may say that his life is a violation of the law of God, which is binding on all men in all ages. To each we may appeal to implore God for forgiveness and for a new heart on which is written the law by the miraculous work of the Divine Spirit. Have not all great evangelists done this? Did not Dwight L. Moody preach a whole series of revival sermons on the Ten Commandments? (Later printed under the title *Weighed and Wanting*.)

Yes, we may do all this and be considered orthodox in the matter of law and grace. But let us include in our appeal to men the fourth commandment, and a storm breaks around our heads. Moody included the fourth command in his fervent series on the Ten Commandments. But no storm broke over him. No one accused him of legalism, of setting up another standard for salvation than Jesus Christ. But then Moody did not call on men to keep the "Sabbath day according to the commandment"; he called on them to keep holy the first day of the week!

A Strange Situation

Here is a strange situation indeed. It is even more strange when viewed in the setting of the fact that legalism is often directly involved in the urge that is put on people to keep Sunday. Have not our critics heard of Sunday laws that have been put on the statute books by ardent preachers, and vigorously invoked by them? Just why we who invoke only the grace of God to enable man to obey the command to keep holy the seventh day, should be charged as legalists, while the hosts of Sunday keeping ministers, who often invoke the strong arm of the law in order to compel men to rest on the first day of the week, should claim to be the exponents of grace, is surely a strange contradiction. Seventh day Adventists have ever been vigorous opponents of the idea of approaching Sabbath rest from the legal standpoint, whereas Sunday keeping preachers are the ones who have lobbied almost every legislative body in Christian lands into enacting strong laws to protect Sunday! We who are Seventh day Adventists must suffer the constant strictures of a large majority of the Sunday keeping ministry for our refusal to support their program of Sunday legislation. They declare that we are in league with the lawless element, who want an open Sunday. But whenever we urge the keeping of the seventh day Sabbath, and invoke the law of God, some of those same ministers cry out that we are legalists! Why the difference?

A Situation Still More Strange

To repeat the question asked earlier in this book, for it bears repeating. Just what is there about preaching first-day sacredness from the fourth commandment, as Protestant denominations in general have done through all the years, that transports such preachers to the balmy paradise of grace, whereas the preaching of seventh day sacredness from the same fourth commandment consigns such preachers to the chill limbo of legalism? We who preach seventh day sacredness certainly do not do so more sternly and rigorously than first-day preachers. Even a cursory acquaintance with Protestant history reveals that Sunday sacredness has quite frequently been proclaimed with a severity that frightened into conformity the majority and thrust into jail the remainder. If today there is a certain relaxation of this severity, it certainly does not reflect any fundamental difference of view toward the first day by religious leaders, for they bemoan the laxity that has crept in.

Perhaps some of our critics will say that they do not believe in this view of first-day sacredness. But that is surely not to the point. The charge of legalism is made by critics who represent a variety of Protestant bodies, which bodies have been parties to Sunday legislation. We therefore return to the question: Why is it a display of grace and faith to preach first-day sacredness from the Ten Commandments, but a non-Christian display of legalism to preach seventh day sacredness from the same law?

In substance, we are charged as being "heretical" because of our beliefs on the law in general and the fourth precept in particular. The question is: Wherein does the heresy lie? In our view of the law in general, that it is God's unchangeable code for all men in all ages? No, for we declare our complete harmony with the classic confessions of faith on this point. Is it because of our view of the fourth precept in particular? And if so, why, in view of the facts presented in the preceding paragraphs?

Some time ago I fell into conversation with a Baptist minister. He deplored the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy that was shattering his denomination. He said he judged that every denomination was thus troubled, however. I replied that ours was not. He marveled. No marvel, I said;

the explanation is simple. Seventh day Adventists could not possibly be evolutionists, for we keep the seventh day of the weekly cycle as a memorial of the completion of God's creative work in the first week of time. We keep this day holy because "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, . . . and rested the seventh day." When we rest on the seventh day, we think of Him who rested on that day and blessed it. Ever remembering the Sabbath, we cannot forget creation. And ever believing in the Sabbath, we must ever believe in creation. We think rather of Eden than of Sinai when we keep the Sabbath.

The complete freedom from Modernism in the Seventh day Adventist denomination, even in its colleges, is an eloquent proof of the truth of what we here claim regarding the Sabbath. Yet, behold, this Sabbath doctrine, which is our strong bulwark against Modernism, proves to be part of the reason for a withering indictment of us by Fundamentalists, in whose ranks our critics are generally found.

How Valid Is the Testimony of an Ex-Adventist?

Have our critics any further evidence they wish to present to support their charge that Adventists are legalists? Yes, one more bit of evidence, the testimony of certain men who have gone from us. A few men after leaving us have declared that they have been "delivered from Adventism," meaning most generally and most specifically that they have been delivered from a legalistic religion and are now rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the gospel.

Now, no testimony is accepted in any court without a cross examination of the witness. Here are some questions we, as Adventists, would like to ask an ex-Adventist witness testifying for our critics. Would you please tell us precisely what teaching of the Adventist Church in the matter of the law of God bound and fettered you, and what different view do you now hold on the law that gives you such glorious liberty? To what great Protestant creed or profession of faith do you point as containing your present view, or have you moved outside of all the historic creeds in order to find your present belief on the law?

If the witness answers that he was delivered from the Adventist teaching that the law of God is binding on all men in all ages as an expression of the great moral principles of God, then we would ask him to show us in what way this Adventist teaching is different from the Protestant creeds. This he could not do, for our teaching is identical with that of the great Protestant bodies. If the witness then declared that he had moved beyond these historic creeds, we would ask him, Who has departed from the faith? Who has turned his back on the Protestant teaching on the law-he, or Adventists?

If he answers that the Adventist teaching on the law had kept him from looking to Christ, we would ask him to be very specific in citing his proof. For reasons already stated we would not accept as valid evidence some stray phrases or sentences that appeared to support the charge of legalism that ran counter to the explicit words of the Adventist Statement of Belief and the whole tenor of our teachings. We would not do this for the same reason that we would not accept a stray statement from James or any other Bible writer that might be submitted by a Catholic in behalf of the doctrine of works. We would ask the witness whether he had ever been called upon by the Adventist Church to preach any other view of the law than that set down in our Statement of Belief. His answer would have to be No.

We would also consider it proper to call to his attention the statement he made to his employing conference when he withdrew from the Adventist ministry. I do not recall during my years of ministry of any preacher who has gone out from us declaring, as he did so, that he was leaving in order to be free from the shackles of legalism. Of course, there may have been such a case. I can only speak from memory. However, I need not strain my memory unduly, for only a few ministers have left the denomination. In most instances those who have left have done so at the request of their brethren and because of a moral fall. It is certainly disclosing no secret to say this. Adventists are still flesh and blood, and can fall before temptation the same as all others if they give ear to the tempter.

Of this sad, but fortunately very small, number who have had to leave our Adventist ministry under a cloud, I can recall two who took to preaching on their own or in some loose affiliation with another religious body, and who declared from the public platform that they had been delivered from the legalism of Adventism and now were rejoicing in the free grace of God!

This observation is made in no cynical vein and with no attempt merely to prove a case, but only to relate simple facts of history, current history that is known and can be verified. These facts are offered simply as proof that an ex-Adventist minister may not be giving the real reasons for his departure from the Adventist Church when he stands up to speak or sits down to write against us. Nothing could better illustrate the well-known fact that the reasons people offer for their actions are not necessarily the real reasons, and may, indeed, be the very opposite of the truth.

Would Our Critics Be Willing?

Would our critics, who often are spokesmen for other religious bodies, be willing to have their

religious organizations and their doctrinal teachings evaluated in terms of the testimony offered by ministers who had left their denominations for one reason or another? Then why should Adventists be indicted because of statements made by ministers who leave us? In any organization there are always a few men who, for one reason or another, fall out of step. There are occasions, of course, when a man, yes, a minister may leave an organization because of a sincere difference of conviction. But in too many instances men leave with bitterness in their heart and thus with a distorted idea of the whole organization. The Adventist Church cannot hope to escape from this kind of personnel problem, a problem created sometimes by bad digestion, sometimes by bad nerves, and sometimes simply by a bad heart.

A Reprehensible Course

But if it is unfair to judge a denomination by the testimony of an ex-minister, how reprehensible to make capital of testimony offered on a denomination's theology by an ex-employee who was never ordained to the ministry! But let an ex-Adventist employee, printer, businessman, or what not, cry out that he was delivered from Adventist legalism, and how quickly certain of our critics joyfully rally round him. With straight face they describe him as a former Adventist leader who held positions of great trust and who is singularly qualified to speak with authority on what that denomination believes and teaches and what its broad policies have been.

Yet the man thus lauded may have been employed in some wholly non-ministerial activity, may never have attended an Adventist college or secondary school, to say nothing of a theological seminary, and thus be hardly as well qualified to speak on Adventist doctrine as the average Adventist layman. Yet somehow a lone man like this is taken as the last word on our theology. If it is a consensus of laymen's testimony that our critics sincerely desire, why do they not follow the suggestions already offered as to taking a poll of our lay members? Or is it that they wish to hear only the testimony that pleases them, even if that testimony must be a lone voice?

Surely this is a strange procedure. Would our ministerial critics ever think of exalting a businessman in their church as a spokesman on their theology? Would they not ridicule the idea that a non-ministerial manager of one of their institutions, for example, should speak with authority concerning their denomination? Would they not consider it outrageous if the interpretation given to their doctrines by such a man, in opposition to that of all their authorized spokesmen, were accepted by critics as valid testimony against the teachings of their denomination? Yes, and would they not feel doubly outraged if such a man built his case against them on stray phrases from their various works, and critics promoted such an eclectic theological production as being unquestionably correct and authoritative? To ask that question is to answer it.

Those Early Records

This discussion can hardly be closed without a word regarding early Adventist history. Some critic may even think to search for evidence of legalism in the records of the early decades of our history when doctrinal views were being slowly crystallized. But surely no fair-minded person would be much impressed by such evidence. The student of church history may remember Philip Schaff's observation regarding the beginnings of Protestantism, when the Reformers were so dominated with the glorious truth of the liberty of the gospel that some in the movement tended to mistake license for liberty. Even Calvin was ready to assert his right to bowl on the green on Sunday to show his liberty in the gospel. But no one would therefore think of charging that Presbyterianism teaches such a view.

In the first few decades of the Seventh day Adventist Church some of its leaders were so solemnized with the truth that God's law is eternally binding that they were tempted to give it excessive and perhaps unwarranted emphasis in relation to other truths. Some of them even feared that the strong emphasis that other Adventists wished to place on righteousness by faith might blur the vital truth regarding God's law.

There is nothing mysterious about this. Good men in any developing religious movement require at least a few decades to stabilize their beliefs. Schaff provides a thoughtful sketch of how slowly there developed in Protestantism the proper realization of the doctrine of God's law. It seemed so alien at first to the idea of gospel liberty!

Only a live and growing organization meets opposition. And the kind of opposition is the measure of the strength of the case that opponents feel they can make out against us! Surely our critics, who are neither knaves nor dolts, must have quiet moments of misgivings when they ponder this whole matter of their attacks on Adventists. They know that stray phrases can prove anything and thus prove nothing, and they know that all our formal statements on the law parallel those of the Protestant creeds. They know that they could not risk taking the poll suggested. They know that the victories gained by Adventists over liquor and tobacco, for example, cannot fit into any picture of legalism.

Sabbath Kept Joyfully

What is more, our critics know that Adventists keep the fourth commandment-the Sabbath command-with a joyfulness and sincerity with which they (the critics) fain would have their communicants keep Sunday. They know that while they, or their fellow opponents of Adventism, seek laws to under gird Sunday, Adventists keep the Sabbath without the aid of any legal statutes by the state, and are indeed militantly opposed to any legal approach to the matter of Sabbath keeping.

Yes, and our critics, who are generally of the Fundamentalist ranks, know that Adventists are untainted by skeptical, evolutionist doctrines, and that they are ever protected from such heresy by their weekly keeping of the Sabbath in memory of God's having created the heavens and the earth.

Warm and Spontaneous Liberality

Our critics also know that Seventh day Adventists give gladly and with a liberality that far outdistances the giving of virtually all other churches in Christendom, and they know that such warm liberality could not spring from cold legalism.

Besides all this, our critics know that Adventists conduct a mission program out of all proportion to their size, that they go into the heart of Africa, the recesses of Asia, and the jungles of the South Seas, and that as a result of their preaching raw savages turn from devil worship, from filthy, enslaving habits, to live circumspect, happy Christian lives. Our critics know that legalism is powerless to do this. Have they not, as good Fundamentalists, often declared that Modernists lack either the urge to go as missionaries or the power to transform lives if they went?

All this and more must trouble the thinking of our critics in their quiet moments. We think it should!