

## 8. Anti-Sabbath Texts Continued

RICHARD HAMMILL

Associate Secretary, Department of Education, General Conference

### Romans 13:8-10

IN A DISCUSSION of Romans 13:8-10 the author under review says in the present passage the Holy Spirit twice declares that love fulfills the law. They [Seventh-day Adventists] cannot exempt the Sabbath from this context without destroying the unity of the 'Eternal Ten,' hence their dilemma." He continues, "How any student of New Testament Greek could read the unmistakable language of the apostle and then exclude the Sabbath commandment from his argument, passes my understanding." Mr. Martin builds up a straw man and feels good about having demolished it. Seventh day Adventists are the people who down through the years have valiantly stood for the unity of the "Eternal Ten." It is Mr. Martin and men like him who would say that a Christian should live in harmony with nine of the commandments but that he is free to violate the fourth. Seventh-day Adventists are not in any dilemma, but those who would try to remove from the Ten Commandments the fourth commandment are. We do not exclude the Sabbath commandment from the great commandment of love.

In discussing this passage, however, Mr. Martin has apparently forgotten the words of Jesus: "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). The law of love was fully enunciated in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Leviticus 19:18). Love fulfilled the law in Old Testament times, even at the time the Ten Commandments were given, just as well as it does now. The basic principle back of the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." These first four commandments help people to understand that the principle of love to God means that they shall not have any other god besides the Lord, that they shall not worship images of other gods, that they shall not take the name of God in vain, and that they shall remember God's Sabbath day to keep it holy. Jesus said that this great commandment to love the Lord is the greatest of all the commandments, and the first four of the Ten Commandments merely spell out more fully what is included in it.

The commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself is described by Jesus as the "second" commandment. The last six commandments of the Ten Commandments spell out more fully the principle of loving one's neighbor as oneself. A person who loves his neighbor in this way certainly will first of all honor his parents; he will not kill anyone, but respect his neighbor's life. He will not commit adultery, respecting his neighbor's person; he will not steal, respecting his neighbor's property; neither will he bear false witness nor covet that which is his neighbor's, because he is to love his neighbor as himself. In other words, the "second" commandment, "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself," does not abrogate any of the last six commandments of the Ten Commandments. It merely comprehends them and is the over-all principle concerning the application of which these six commandments give us further instruction. By the same principle the first commandment to love God with all the heart does not abrogate any one of the first four commandments, for they are included in its over-all principle. We do not see that Adventists face any dilemma here.

One who examines the context of Romans 13:8-10 will note that in this section of the book of

Romans the apostle Paul is dealing with the relationships that should obtain between men. In the first part of the book of Romans the apostle discussed in a magnificent way man's relationship with God, showing that one is saved by his faith in God and in the atonement provided for him. In the last part of the book the apostle seeks to show how one who has been saved by faith will relate himself to his fellows. It is for this reason that in the thirteenth chapter the apostle did not introduce what Jesus called the first great commandment of loving God with all the heart and including the more specific spelling out of this in the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments. Inasmuch as he was discussing strictly the relationship of man to man, he cited only the second great principle-love to one's neighbor-and in particular those specifications that show that an individual who loves his neighbor will not commit adultery with him, will not kill him, will not steal from him, or bear false witness against him, or covet anything that is his. Paul is by no stretch of the imagination saying that when a person loves his neighbor as himself he need not observe these last six commandments; he is saying that the over-all principle of love to one's neighbor includes all of these. And to keep them out of love is the only effectual way, for love fills in all the gaps between the commandments; it reaches over them and underneath and around them; but it does not go contrary to any one of them.

As we have said, from chapter twelve of Romans onward Paul is discussing man's relationship with man. Certainly the apostle Paul would have been shocked had he known that Christian men in later times would use his words as if the first great commandment of loving God with all the heart, embracing the first four of the specific commandments of the Ten Commandments, had no relevance for Christians. It really amazes us that Romans 13:8-10 could be advanced as an argument for not keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. It could just as well be advanced as an argument that it is all right to worship idols or to take the name of God in vain. Seventh-day Adventists stand for the unity of the "Eternal Ten," and with the Lord's help we will seek to fulfill these ten, not out of legalistic observance, but because we want to love God with all our hearts and want to love our neighbors as ourselves.

### **Romans 14:5-7**

We agree with our friend Walter Martin that the fourteenth chapter of Romans calls upon Christians not to engage in judging one another. God is the judge of all mankind, and it is He who decides on the moral worth of individuals. A human being cannot know for sure the reasoning and the convictions of another person, and is in no position therefore to judge whether that person is violating his basic convictions of right and wrong. Christians are, however, obligated to bear witness of their faith in Christ and to preach the Word in season and out of season. Informed, enlightened Seventh-day Adventists do not try to take over God's prerogative of judging His servants, but we do feel it is our duty to preach the Word of God as we understand it. We do not consider that we are "passing judgment" on those who observe the first day of the week when we set forth what we consider to be the Biblical teaching on the necessity of Christians to shape their lives in harmony with all the Ten Commandments, as well as with the other teachings of the Word of God. We would leave the Bible itself to do its own cutting and convicting.

Before we discuss the teaching of the fourteenth chapter of Romans, we would make reference to several statements of Walter Martin in this section of his book. He intimates that Seventh-day Adventists keep the seventh-day Sabbath because we believe the Spirit of Prophecy was manifested through Mrs. White and that she confirmed the teaching of Joseph Bates regarding the seventh-day Sabbath. Seventh-day Adventists have never based the doctrine of the Sabbath on anything but the Bible. It is the supreme court of appeal and the only authority to us in matters of doctrine. We do not believe that the verdict of that court invalidates our teachings. We feel that our friend Martin and others have dealt very loosely with many passages of the Bible. For instance, on page 172 this author says, "The early Christian church met upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). He has many times charged that Adventists do not consider the context of Scripture passages nor the grammatical construction. We ask, How is it possible to claim 1 Corinthians 16:2 in support of his contention that the early church met on the first day of the week?"

Even a cursory examination of the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 16:2 shows that the apostle Paul is counseling the Corinthian believers to store up in their homes freewill gifts for the great offering that he was assembling on behalf of the needy Christian believers in Jerusalem. The Greek phrase can be translated in no other way than "at one's home" or "by himself." The phrase is an almost exact equivalent of the French *chez lui*, "at one's home." It is clear that the apostle is telling the people to lay these funds aside so that when he comes they will have them stored up and can merely turn them over to him, and he will not

have to make an extended appeal for funds. Second Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, give full details of this great offering that the apostle Paul is assembling, and in 1 Corinthians 16:2 he is encouraging the believers to lay money aside for that purpose. Despite the clear intent of this passage, from its context and linguistic analysis, some, Martin included, grasp at it like a drowning person at a straw for support of their theory that the early church met upon the first day of the week. This type of interpretation certainly is insufficient to establish any such doctrine.

Now let us look at Romans 14, in which Paul describes two groups in the church—the “strong” and the “weak.” The apostle says that the weak eat vegetables, but another thinks that he can eat all things. In using a comparable passage of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 8 and 9, we discern immediately that Paul is not speaking of the matter of clean and unclean foods, but rather is discussing a problem that was tremendously acute for the early Christians living in Greek cities. This problem arose primarily because pagan priests and others frequently sold in the market place for food, animals that had previously been offered in the temples as sacrifices to the gods. Some Christians maintained that if a believer ate food, even of a clean animal, that had been offered before these heathen gods, it would be acknowledging the existence of such a god, and having communion with him. Since they could not tell for sure whether meat purchased in the market place had been offered before idols, some of the Christians maintained that they would not eat any meat at all, but to be sure, would eat only vegetables. Other Christians believed that there was no other god except the Lord, and therefore they didn’t care whether animals had been offered before the heathen idols or not. They would eat them anyway. Over such a matter as this the apostle urged the believers not to judge one another or engage in extended acrimonious debates about it, but each was to honor the convictions of the other on this matter concerning which God had not spoken.

In the same way the apostle said, verse 5: “One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” Here again, to understand this passage we must place ourselves in the position of the early Christian believers. Many of them had come out of Judaism and had been used to observing the annual Jewish feasts and the accompanying ceremonial rites. It was very difficult for such people to abandon their religious practices of long standing. In the New Testament we read that many of the people in the church at Jerusalem continued to take part in certain of these Jewish rites, and they even urged the apostle Paul to take part in them also. Acts 21:21-27. Paul often attended these great annual feasts after his conversion (Acts 18:21, etc.), not because he felt any religious obligation to do so, but because it afforded wonderful opportunities to witness for Christ to the multitudes who congregated there.

Under such circumstances it seemed best to allow these various long-ingrained practices to disappear gradually rather than to insist that, inasmuch as these ceremonial requirements pointing forward to Christ had no more validity after Christ had come, Christians must abandon them at once. In view of these facts, it becomes apparent that the apostle Paul was not teaching the Romans that they should not live in harmony with the provisions of the Ten Commandments, and its weekly Sabbath, but that he was telling them they were free to use their own judgment as to whether they would have any part in the Jewish festivals and ceremonial requirements. The fact that he said the strong had laid them aside shows that he himself considered that Christian believers would be wiser to abandon these things, but that it was wrong for them to judge the person who out of long habit and convictions would like to go on with them.

The Jews hated the apostle Paul because he taught that the requirements of Judaism that had pointed forward to the Messiah had no more validity now that the Messiah had come. They rejected the idea that the Messiah had come, and so they hated Paul for teaching the people that they could abandon those parts of the Jewish law that foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah. However, not once do we find the Jews accusing Paul of being a breaker of the Sabbath day. They were anxious to find every fault with him that they could, and had the apostle been teaching that the seventh-day Sabbath—which God had given at Creation and which antedated the ceremonial practices in connection with the sanctuary services—had been abrogated, they would immediately have brought charges against him for Sabbath breaking. However, in no place do they accuse the apostle Paul of this. Rather, the apostle himself when on trial before Agrippa spoke of his manner of life as follows: “I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). Paul did not appeal to his apostolic authority for teaching that the seventh-day Sabbath had been abolished and that the Christian church was now keeping the first day of the week in honor of Christ’s resurrection. He stoutly asserted that he taught nothing except that which the prophets and Moses did say should come. Certainly the prophets and Moses did not prophesy of the abolishing of the seventh-day Sabbath and the setting up of the first day of the week as the Lord’s day.

The efforts of some of our Christian brethren to discredit the great moral law of God, which God gave to show men the way in which He desires them to live, brings discouragement to us who are trying to follow in the footsteps of Christ and are trying to abide by the Word of God. We shudder when efforts are made to show that the law of God is contrary to the best interests of men, that it is against us and contrary to us. Anciently the Lord told His people: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12,13). God said He had given the commandments for our good. We Adventists thank God for His law, in which we discern the way that He would have us live. And we are grateful to it when it points out errors in our lives, for then, instead of being insensitive to our danger, we turn to Christ for forgiveness and seek Him for strength to live according to His law. We ask Him to help us love Him with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves, that we might fulfill His will for us. We feel that Satan, the great archenemy of God and man, is trying to bring discredit upon the law of God because it is that law that brought conviction of sin to him, and because it convicts mankind of sin, and leads them to turn to their Savior and to escape from sin's grasp.

As a people we want to take our stand firmly upon the Bible and under the banner of Jesus Christ. We heed His counsel that the two great commandments are to love God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves; and we understand that these two embody in principle all the teachings and provisions of the Word of God. We repeat that if we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not steal from him or bear false witness against him. Also, if we love God with all our hearts, we will not violate His holy Sabbath day any more than we would bow before idols. We reverence the words of our Savior, "If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth- (John 14:15-17). We feel that it would be presumptuous for us to seek the great blessing of the presence of the Spirit of truth if we are willfully violating His Word. We cannot ignore such scriptural admonitions as "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

To sum it up, Seventh-day Adventists believe that Christ is our Savior and also our Lord. We do not believe that our Lord who forgives us our sins leaves us wallowing in our sins. Such reasoning does despite to the grace of God. We believe our Lord and Savior has a program of living for those who are His sons and daughters. We do not believe that Christians can contribute in the least degree to their own salvation, for salvation is a free gift from God through faith as we accept Christ as our Savior. At the same time we believe that one who accepts Christ as Savior is willing to renounce all sin. With the apostle Paul we say, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Romans 6:1, 2).

The good news of salvation reached us when we were lost, like the prodigal in the far country. By faith we accept Christ's forgiveness, but we are not content to stay in the far country. We feel that we owe an allegiance to the One who loved us with an everlasting love and who gave His life that we might have forgiveness. We believe in "obedience to the faith" (Romans 1:5). We accept the forgiveness and the rest that Christ offers us; we are ready also to take up His yoke. We agree with John R. Stott, rector of All Soul's Church in London, who wrote in the magazine *Eternity*, September, 1959, page 17: "In saying that saving faith includes obedience, I mean that in true faith there is an element of submission. Faith is directed towards a Person. It is in fact a complete commitment to this Person involving not only an acceptance of what is offered but a humble surrender to what is or may be demanded."

We believe that God has called His sons and daughters unto holiness, but that it is impossible to maintain the forgiveness of our Lord and receive His free justification and sanctification if we willingly continue to violate a program of life which He has outlined for us, and part of this outline is in the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment. We would heed the words of the apostle James, "But be you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But who so looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:22-25). We look into the mirror of God's Word and we find there a picture of ourselves as those needing the grace of Christ. We accept that grace. We find in God's mirror the image of our Savior in whose footsteps we are to follow. We see in this mirror the revealed will of God, and we see that to please Him we should fashion our lives according to His revealed will. It is for this reason that we gladly and willingly keep the seventh day of the week, the day that God has called "My holy day," and the only true Lord's day. Governor Mark Hatfield, writing in the same issue of *Eternity*, said:

But the man who looks into the perfect mirror of God's law, the law of liberty, and makes a habit of doing so is not the man who sees and forgets. He puts the law into practice and he wins true happiness.

If a man is seeking a practical faith, he must turn to the knowledge and truth found in the great textbook of our faith, the Holy Bible. And when he finds this truth, then he applies it, he lives it, he practices it. With this principle we are in perfect agreement, and it is this type of practice that we are seeking for ourselves.