

PROCLAIMING THE SABBATH MORE FULLY¹

By Paul Penno, Jr.

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Come back with me, across the centuries to a day nearly two thousand years ago, to the humble little village of Nazareth. We make our way down the narrow cobblestone street, past the little shops with their open fronts. We see the workmen plying their trades as we pass one shop after another. There is an Oriental atmosphere about it all.

And then we come to a shop that is different. The front is neatly whitewashed, and the street has been swept. We enter and find a kindly, stalwart man plying the carpenter's trade, and by his side a young assistant perhaps twenty-one years of age. The young man is planning a piece of wood, making it true, making it straight. He rests a moment and wipes His brow. As He turns, we see that He has the bearing of a prince, of a king. For He is none other than the Prince of heaven, King Jesus, come to cast His lot with the toilers and the poor, to live among men and die in their place.

We hurry on. But we come back again, for we are fascinated by the little shop. We come back on Thursday. We come back on Friday. We come back on Saturday. But on Saturday the shop is closed. The tools have been carefully put away. The shavings have been gathered up from the floor. All is quiet.

We notice that the people are all walking toward a conspicuous building in the center of the village. We

follow them and find our seats in the rear of a well-filled church. We wait a moment. Then imagine our surprise as we see the carpenter's Son make His way into the pulpit, open the scroll, and begin to read. The record says of a day some years later: * "And 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 for to read" (Luke 4:16).

The example of Jesus is clear and consistent. His custom was a Sabbath-keeping custom. There is no confusion. There is no contradiction. There need be no speculation. Your Saviour and mine, from the first to the last of His ministry, kept only one day—the seventh day of the commandment—as the Sabbath.

Our name, Seventh-day Adventists, proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. The seventh-day Sabbath is God's rest of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Could it be that this is what Ellen White means when she said we shall proclaim "the Sabbath more fully."² It is the seal of God's love in the hearts of His people.

God created the earth in six days and He rested on the seventh day. This made the Sabbath God's day of rest. He ended His work which He had done on the six days of creation. The seventh day was His perfect rest.

¹ Hebrews 4:3-4; 393; 382, O Day of Rest and Gladness.

² "I saw that God had children who do not see and keep the Sabbath. They have not rejected the light upon it. And at the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and proclaimed the *Sabbath more fully.*" Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 33.

God could have created all things in five days and given the sixth day as the day of rest. God could have worked in creating all things in four days and given the fifth day as His rest. God could have labored three days and given the fourth day as the Sabbath. God could have created in two days and given the third day as rest to man. God could have created all things in the first day and given the second day as the Sabbath. However, God could never have labored in creating all things on the first day and then made man and woman and given them the first day as a day of His Sabbath rest, because the first day of creation will always be a day of God's labor in creating. Therefore, the first day of the week, Sunday, could never be God's Sabbath day of rest.

He gave His rest to man. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Gen. 2:2). Since Jesus Christ was the Creator, He gave Adam and Eve Himself, the perfect rest of the Sabbath. There was no work in it for them. They had nothing to do in order to receive His rest. They enjoyed Jesus Christ's rest by faith.

Christ explained to them how He had created all things by His Word. They received His word without doubt or question. They simply said, "Amen" to what He told them. By faith they received the "rest" of Christ. The point is Adam lived by faith in every word spoken to him by God. He believed Christ's story that He was the Creator from whose hand he was made. Adam believed and he expressed his love to the Creator by obedience in rest and

fellowship with Christ. There was perfect harmony between the Creator and Adam. The mind of Adam and the mind of Christ were on the same page.

The Sabbath is the sign of faith in Christ and His word. The Sabbath is the sign of God's covenant with man. "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbath is God's time, sanctified by His presence, and God's rest. This is God's promise to man. In my Sabbath you have perfect "rest" and peace with your Creator. In my Sabbath you have the fullness of God in 24-hour time. In my Sabbath you have Christ's holiness of love.

Adam's observance of the Sabbath by faith in Christ involved His responsive "Amen" to the everlasting covenant of God with man.

The Sabbath was a test of Adam's covenant loyalty to God. God's covenant is Christ given to man with its outward sign being the seventh-day Sabbath. Should Adam reject in any way his creature status, it would be an act of unbelief in the revealed Christ as His Creator and the Sabbath of which it is a sign would be humanly rejected. The Sabbath as the seal of God's everlasting covenant could never be broken by man for his unbelief cannot change the promise of God in Christ.

Adam's unbelief in Christ's word by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in order to become like God, constituted him a sinner. When Christ came to Adam on the Sabbath, the peace and harmony which formerly existed between them was dramatically disrupted and Adam was

completely alienated from God. The source of the enmity was all on his part and not on God's side. God had come to the garden in search of fallen man. Adam was afraid and hid from the seeking God.

Man's sin has clouded his perceptions. He cannot figure out its end game. He must have a revelation from God of its true designs. Adam's guilt, loneliness, and emptiness had left him in such a psychological state that the only way to survive was to deny sin's existence in self. So unconsciously he tucked it away in a deep, dark, inner closet in order to forget about it. However, it was like trying to hide a dead corpse. The stench was an ever-present reminder of something rotten inside. The outward signs of rebellious behavior were constantly bubbling forth. Adam's social life with Eve as well as with God showed the signs of stress, unrest, and fatigue. Things were at the breaking point.

God's covenant of peace in the Sabbath was disrupted by man's unbelief in Christ. Adam really desired the extinction of Christ. He didn't want Him around. He would rather Christ be dead. Hence, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) was revealed in the sacrifice of a sheep at Adam's hand. For Adam to contemplate the murder of an animal which he had cherished and named, must have been a horror to his senses. And then for it to be gutted and the carcass skinned in order that he might wear it for protection from the elements must have been like feeling death as a present reality so that he might have life. Adam must have abhorred himself. In humility he must

have attributed his continued life to the forgiveness and bestowal of the Creator's love.

Before the creation of the world, God had anticipated such a turn of events. The Father and the Son had exchanged mutual promises that in the event that man should choose to exercise his freedom in unbelief, they both would give their life, represented by the Son's death, in order to win back the heart of Adam and his children. Their promise to each other formed the everlasting covenant in eternity past before creation. "The counsel of *peace* shall be between them both" (Zech. 6:12).

Now all their creative power must be focused not only in sustaining life as we know it, in a sinful world, but in convincing alienated hearts that They love sinners and wish to restore them to covenant relations with God. God's wants to win the peace with rebellious, self-exalting men.

How is the Sabbath the sign of the message of the cross of Christ? The Sabbath was the original sign of peace with Adam before sin entered. The Sabbath is the sign of peace with God for those whose "self" is crucified with Christ. The Sabbath was the original sign of peace in the pristine world and in the earth made new. "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that . . . from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD" (Isa. 66:22, 23). The Sabbath is to be the sign of

God's everlasting covenant peace with restored mankind in the new earth.

How does the message of Jesus' cross reveal the Sabbath truth more fully? What is the connection of the Sabbath and the atonement Christ gives sinners? The meaning of the word "atonement" is at-one-ment. How does God make rebels to be at peace with Him? And what role does the seventh-day Sabbath serve in His great love story?

Christ completed His work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day. Christ completed His perfect sacrifice on Calvary the sixth day—Friday—and He rested in the tomb on the seventh day. The sign of His "rest" in triumph over sin is the Sabbath. The women who embalmed His body for burial, "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56), with Him on the seventh day. The Sabbath is Christ's memorial of creation and redemption. The Sabbath is Christ's declaration of peace to sinners. He legally declared to all His forgiveness of sinners with the words, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus exposed the "unknown sin" that is buried in the heart of every rebel. It is the root of our controversy with God. It is the cause of our misapprehension of His nature as being a God of anger and wrath against us. The cause of our distrust of God is that hidden within lurks the desire to get rid of God. Sinners blame God for all their guilt, unrest. They look upon Him as being demanding with all kinds of rules too difficult and

restricting. If we could just get rid of God then we would have peace.

Really the problem is not getting rid of God. The problem is to get rid of our misapprehensions regarding the nature of God as wrathful toward sinners and to see His love revealed in the death of Christ for you and me. Jesus died on the cross to reveal our unconscious sin that we want to get rid of Him. If we can see that, then we can begin to know what we forgiveness means.

The atonement is about God winning our rebel hearts. The atonement has nothing to do with changing God's disposition toward us as sinners. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10).

We have been taught and nurtured on the false theory of the atonement which comes straight out of paganism. It really hinges on two words "expiate" and "propitiate". The pagans believed in a vengeful god. When people "sin" they must deflect his anger with an offering. It may be the sacrifice of one's own flesh and blood that can bribe the offended deity, because he is really blood-thirsty. And so sin can be transferred as some kind of entity separable from the one who committed it and put on the human sacrifice. And thus "god's" vengeance can be appeased or "propitiated" by the bribe of an offering. The offering is self-motivated, and involved another human or animal, and disposed of sin without actually changing anything so far as the

sinner's heart was concerned. This was the false, pagan atonement idea where man provided the pathway of reconciliation to "god". This was the problem with Cain's offering.

This pagan idea of the atonement, being an "expiation" to appease the offended god, has entered into Christianity through the Romish church. To the extent that it has survived in Protestantism through the ideas of "expiation" and "propitiation," are an indication of how dependent the daughters are to the mother so far as their beliefs are concerned. The writings of evangelicals are filled with the theory of the atonement being an offended God's wrath against sinners being deflected from them and poured out upon a propitiatory sacrifice. The basic concept is that God needs the atonement with sinners which only His Son can provide.

"On Him Almighty vengeance fell,
"Which would have sunk a world to hell.
"He bore it for a chosen race,
"And thus becomes our Hiding Place.

"The fires of God's judgment burned themselves out on Him, and all who are in Christ are safe forever, for they are now standing where the fire has been."³

Along with this is the idea that sin is an entity separable from sinners. It can be put on the head of Christ, and He takes the hit from God instead of us. Thus God's blood-thirstiness is satisfied. Sin is all paid for. There is nothing more to it. All one has to

do is to believe that and go on their way with the assurance that they are "saved".

This is the false view of the atonement. It has really brought about no reconciliation of alienated hearts to God because it is all an intellectual assent to a certain false belief. It manipulates sin around as some kind of separable entity apart from the one who commits it. It is a presumptuous faith. It leads to the undermining of the law of God and lawlessness. If sin can be so easily disposed of as a personal act of faith in sin being a detached entity put on Christ without any genuine change of heart it is a total disregard of the law of God.

Then, add to that, the full-blown assertion of self-arrogance in the claim, "I am saved"! These are the seeds of antinomianism or lawlessness. Such belief in "once saved, always saved" is lit from the hellish torch of Satan's false gospel, passed along in the pagan religion of a vengeful God, and absorbed into Roman Christianity and perpetuated in Protestantism.

What is the true atonement? God does not need to be reconciled to sinners. Sinners need the atonement in order to be reconciled to God. God will never be reconciled to "sin". But He gives the atonement of Jesus' death for sinners to be reconciled to Him.

Paul sets forth the true concept of the atonement in these words: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23).

³ Robert G. Lee, SERMONIC LIBRARY, pp. 105-106.

Here is God's gift of justification for "all" who "have sinned." It is a universal gift. That God would give to sinners a legal acquittal is a gift which demonstrates the enormity of His love. All sinners should be dead because death is the wages of sin; but, the fact is, all sinners live. Why? Because Jesus died the death which all sinners earned, and now God can plead before the universe that His law is just and upheld. The law has been maintained. He gives a second probationary period of time for individual sinners to see and appreciate His gift so that they, as individuals, may be reconciled to Him by the death of His Son.

When Jesus died on Friday and rested in the tomb on the Sabbath day, God declared His peace to the whole world of sinners. He gave "rest" from sin to all. Jesus is the "rest" from sin to all restless-hearted sinners. All sinners are alienated from God, "because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). God gave the gift of peace to all.

Romans 3:24ff presents the reconciliation of sinners' hearts as justification by faith. "Whom God [the Father] hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His [Jesus'] blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:24-26). It is not just Jesus' sacrifice, for that is what the word "propitiation" means, it is God's sacrifice. God does not need the

"propitiation" to appease His anger toward sinners and thus be reconciled to them, we are the ones who need the "propitiation". It is sinners who are filled with the dark, misapprehensions about the character of God.

The sinner now experiences a change of heart. He is born again by the regeneration of God's manifestation of love in Jesus' death for him/her personally. He experiences justification by faith which is the forgiveness of sins. His past sins are remitted, i.e., they are removed. He knows this to be the case because He believes God's word on this.

Notice it is not a presumptuous faith which claims forgiveness of sins for the future. The heart that is genuinely changed by faith which works through love, does not contemplate future sinning. A reconciled sinner whose heart is receiving the atonement with God humbly stays in an ongoing attitude of repentance and dependence upon Jesus.

For we who have appreciated the gift of Jesus' death for us we are "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

The Bible revelation of the character of God is (b): Jesus says, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). His parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy (Luke 15:3-32) are clear; even the story of the prodigal son emphasizes the seeking love of the father—the lost boy would never have said "I will

arise and go to my father” unless the seeking love of the father had drawn him (cf. John 12:32, 33).

The addict is the Prodigal Son sitting in the pigsty day after day; he cannot forget the prodigal love of the father. Blessed is the hour when he stands up, stomps his feet, chooses to hate the pigsty, and declares, “I will arise and go to my Father . . .”

Our children and youth must not be given the idea that God is like a doctor deep in his sanctum sanctorum office, hard to find! The seeking love of the Father and the self-emptying love of Christ must be made plain. The revelation of the father’s love reconciled the rebel’s heart and restored fellowship.

The intimacy of the Sabbath and the gospel rest from sin is found in the Book of Hebrews. “And God did rest the seventh day from all His works” (Heb. 4:4). “For we which have believed do enter into rest” (Heb. 4:3). The outward sign of the inward rest from sin is the seventh day Sabbath rest of God.

God’s rest from six days’ labor of creation is the Sabbath. Jesus’ rest from giving His life for us is the Sabbath. Creation and redemption are God’s works of *agape*. “For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His” (Heb. 4:10). We enter His Sabbath rest by ceasing from our own works. In other words, we cease from our self-motivated hope of reward and fear of hell which drives our desire for salvation. Our faith is no longer self-motivated, but rather it is a “faith which worketh by love.”

God’s promise to modern Israel is: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws

into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). This is the righteousness of Jesus which is His *agape*. It is a settling into the truth with both mind and heart. It is a restoration of God’s message of love as revealed in Jesus’ death for us. This present truth of the sanctuary is Jesus’ gift to all reconciled hearts. Of them it may truly be said they are receiving the atonement.

The sign and seal of the great law of God which declares and identifies Him as the Creator and Redeemer is the seventh day Sabbath. “Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it . . . Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, . . . and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm. . . .” (Deut. 5:12-15).

God proclaims His love in the sacrifice. His love creates the faith for the sinner. The sinner is convicted that he murdered the Son of God whose innocent blood was shed on Calvary.

Sin is who we are. Our character is composed of a series of habit-forming sin. It is not something that can simply be detached from us without our consent and mystically by an act of faith we are personally reconciled to God. Rather God must win our consent of heart through a revelation of His love.

A friend visited an elderly woman crippled by arthritis. When asked, “Do you suffer much?” she responded, “Yes, but there is no nail here,” and she

pointed to her hand. “He had the nails, I have the peace.” She pointed to her head. “There are no thorns there, He had the thorns, I have the peace.” She touched her side. “There is no spear here. He had the spear, I have the peace.” This is what the atonement of Christ Jesus means for us—He gave of Himself so that we might have the peace.