



Will Freedom Survive?

The Pope's Apostolic Letter on Sunday Keeping

Paul wrote in **1Timothy 4:1** "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." What a warning to every Seventh-day Adventist, that, in the last days, there will be those who have heard and proclaimed the faith, have been convicted by it, but who will allow themselves to be seduced by fables and will accept the doctrines of devils.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good." **1Timothy 3:1-3**. Can you imagine Christians despising those who are good? But we know that they are not true Christians, but only professors of truth, because verse 5 tells us that they have "a form of godliness" but they deny the power thereof. They profess to be servants of Christ, but actually they are "traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." **2Timothy 3:4**.

How are we commanded to deal with people like this? God says, "From such turn away." **2Timothy 3:5**. We are not to have any part with those who do not practice their profession. God's warning is very plain. If we socialize with these sort of people, we will eventually become like them.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." **2Timothy 4:3, 4**.

What a pitiful representation of those who claim to be a part of the company that believes the truth. And yet, these prophecies are fulfilled in our ears. I hear so many people today in churches of every color and stripe that state, "Why do we worry about doctrine?" That is the

cry of the ecumenical movement. They say, "Let us just preach the love of Jesus. The greatest doctrine in Scripture is Jesus' love."

Every doctrine is vital; for the center of each doctrine is the love of Jesus. How can we preach the Sabbath if we do not love the One who is the Lord of the Sabbath? How can we believe in the state of the dead if we do not follow the One who is the resurrection and the life? How can we study the sanctuary message and that doctrine if we do not believe in our High Priest and Mediator?

Christ is the center of every doctrine. If we destroy the doctrines of Scripture, then we have destroyed our knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Doctrines are essential because the doctrines lead us to the foot of the cross, to Jesus Christ. It is the devil who would destroy the doctrines of Scripture. That is the reason why it is stated here that "they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." They will not endure sound doctrine.

We are living in extremely serious times and as Seventh-day Adventists, we need to be alert. Paul's warning to the Thessalonians is very appropriate for us today: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." 1Thessalonians 5:4, 5. The signs of the times give us startling proof that the day of Christ's return is very near. Multiple events make it daily more clear that the closing scenes of earth's history are upon us.

The Pope's Letter

On July 6, 1998, Pope John Paul II issued an official apostolic letter entitled, "Dies Domini" (The Day of the Lord). This letter, which received a great deal of media publicity, was a call by the Pope for Catholics to come back to faithful Sunday keeping.

The Pope's letter began with these words, "The Lord's day—as Sunday was called from **apostolic times...**" (This is the first falsehood of a continual line that is found in this letter.) As proof for this supposition, the Pope refers us to **Revelation 1:10**, the only reference to "the Lord's day," in the Bible. It is the Pope's contention that the Lord's day spoken of here is Sunday. But the Bible never says that. The text simply states, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..."

We are on a weak and faulty foundation when we rely on the mind of man to decide a matter which is not clear to us, for God has commanded us that the Bible is its own interpreter. This verse is interpreted clearly for us in **Luke 6:5**. "And He [Jesus] said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Which day is the Lord's day? It is plain and clear. The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath day, not the first day of the week, the devil's counterfeit, Sunday. The only day that God hallowed is confirmed also in **Matthew 18** and **Matthew 12:8**: "For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day."

Clearly, without any possibility of dispute, the Scripture testifies that the Sabbath is the Lord's day. But here, in the very initial words of this apostolic letter, the Pope states that the Lord's day was called Sunday from apostolic times. If that were true, we should be able to search the Scripture and find the evidence there, because many of the apostles authored Scripture. All of them were written decades after the death of Jesus Christ. Instead we find that in the eight brief mentions that are made of the first day of the week, in the New Testament, not once is it called the Lord's day! The Sabbath is mentioned sixty times, and

never once was it referred to as "the former Sabbath that we kept," or "the old Sabbath." It is always used in the setting of a sacred day which was still being observed. The apostles knew nothing of Sunday being the Lord's day.

The Psalmist and Sunday

If that were not enough, at the commencement of the second paragraph, the Pope makes a statement that any elementary school child, reared in a Christian home, would not be so foolish as to make. He wrote, "Rightly, the Psalmist cry is applied to Sunday. 'This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.' **Psalm 118:24.**"

Did the Psalmist ever conceive that the day on which he was rejoicing was Sunday? It never entered his mind. But here the Pope is saying, "Rightly, the Psalmist cry is applied to Sunday." Wrongly it is applied to Sunday! It is astonishing to see that the Pope, who was considered a very fine Roman Catholic theologian before he became Pope, reaching to such lengths of elementary reasoning in an attempt to prove his point. And he was not working alone. This letter is a product of the best theological minds in the Vatican.

What a disgrace to see how the Pope has been applauded by Protestants around the world. The Anglicans said what a wonderful letter it was, and in England he received the same response. The South Pacific Division Record reported that one of the senior lecturers in theology at Avondale College commented on the "wonderful scholarship" of the Pope's letter! There is only one reason I would give the Pope an "F" for his scholarship in this and that is because you cannot give him anything lower. There is no scholarship at all!

The Pope Explains Sunday Laws

There are other ominous matters in this apostolic letter which we need to give attention to. One such statement is: "Wherefore also in the particular circumstances of our times, Christians will naturally strive to insure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy." What does he mean? Was he merely saying, "Every convicted Sunday keeper should have the right to follow his convictions?" if that were all that the Pope was saying, we would not contend with it. We believe that every man has the right of religious liberty. However, the Pope did not have religious liberty in mind at all.

Earlier on the same page, he tries to underestimate what happened in centuries past in the Roman Catholic Church. "When through the centuries she has made laws concerning Sunday rest, the church has had in mind above all the work of service and worship." In other words, "Our laws were only made to give a time of rest for workers and families." Then you ended at the stake if you did not obey! He forgets to mention the millions of people who lost their lives standing against the evil of the devil's counterfeit "sabbath."

He goes on to say, "In this matter, my predecessor, Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical Rerum Novarum, spoke of Sunday rest as a worker's right, which the state must guarantee." (Pope Leo XIII was the Pope, at the end of the nineteenth century, who stated that it was diabolical doctrine to preach religious liberty.) From these statements it is clear—religious liberty is certainly not what the Pope has in mind.

Why an Apostolic Letter Now?

What was the atmosphere in which the Pope sent out this letter full of Biblical falsehoods and scholarship of the poorest type? Many people have been studying this letter, without seeing it in the context of his prior letter that was sent out on May 28, 1998. That letter was sent out in order to inject into the Roman Catholic Canon law some additional penance. Every one of these new laws deals with punishment! And that is the context in which this letter follows.

Those of us who are well acquainted with Revelation 13:15-17, know that the time is nigh when persecution will come to those who are faithful to the law of God, who desire to worship God in holiness on His holy day.

One of these new Canons, number 1436 states: "Whoever denies a truth which must be believed with divine and Catholic faith or who calls into doubt or who totally repudiates the Christian faith and does not retract after having been legitimately warned is to be punished as a heretic or an apostate with a major excommunication. A cleric moreover can be punished with other penalties not excluding these positions. In addition to these paces, whoever obstinately rejects the teaching that the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops exercising the authentic magisterium have set forth to be held definitively or who affirms what they have condemned as erroneous and does not retract after having been legitimately warned, is to be punished with an appropriate penalty."

Why did the Roman Catholic Church have to create this new Canon law in May, 1998, just prior to the issuing of this apostolic letter on Sunday, which is calling for civil legislation in the matter of Sunday worship? It is time for us to WAKE UP! We are at the end of earth's history. Prophecy is being fulfilled and everything is in place. In the United States everything is in place for the enactment of Sunday laws and penalties of a severe nature.

Another new Canon, which was enacted, was Canon 1371. It states: "The following are to be punished with a just penalty: [We know how much justice there was in the penalties meted out during the Dark Ages.] Apart from the case mentioned in Canon 1364, a person that teaches a doctrine condemned by the Roman Pontiff or by an ecumenical council or obstinately rejects the teachings mentioned in Canon 750 or in Canon 752 when warned by the apostolic See or by the ordinary, does not retract, a person who in any other way does not obey the lawful command or prohibition of the apostolic See or the ordinary or superior and after being warned persists in disobedience."

Did you notice how vague was the designation of those who would be punished? Nowhere does it say, "Those who are faithful to the catholic faith" or "members of the Roman Catholic Church." It says only "whoever denies" or "a person" who does these things will receive these punishments. A person means any person. It has not defined that these laws and punishments are applicable to Roman Catholics and Roman Catholics alone.

And did you notice how vague the penalties were used as: "punished as a heretic," "punished with an appropriate penalty" and "punished with a just penalty." There is no limit placed upon the punishments. However, we do not have to study very far into Catholic history to see what it means to be "punished as a heretic." Just read the stories of the Waldenses or the Reformers, and you can clearly see what the Papacy calls "an appropriate penalty." It is time to awake! These things are happening before our eyes and we need to know where we are.

A New View for Catholicism

In this letter, the Pope takes a new view on Sunday keeping that Catholicism has never taken before. In his first statement he asserted that Sunday has been known as the Lord's day from apostolic times. The Roman Catholic Church has never before proclaimed that their sabbath, Sunday, commenced in apostolic times. That is an absolute denial of what, for hundreds and hundreds of years, the Roman Catholic Church has stated.

For example read the Catechism of Catholic Doctrines, which has the primature of the Catholic Church and was edited by a Roman Catholic priest, Peter Greerman. There a question and answer dialogue is given about Sunday keeping.

"Question: What is the Sabbath day?

"Answer: Saturday is the Sabbath day.

"Question: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

"Answer: We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea 336 A.D., transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday."

Another example from a different priest's catechism asks the question, "Have you any other way of proving that the church has power to institute festivals?"

Answer: Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her. Here are Bible believing Protestants who claim to base their religion on the Bible and the Bible alone, sola Scriptura, and yet they are following that which the Roman Catholic Church has instituted. That is the pagan sabbath of Sunday. Had not she had such power she could not have done that which all modern religionists agree with her, she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority."

Over two and a half centuries passed, beyond apostolic time, before the introduction, by the Roman Catholic Church, of Sunday observance. But now the Pope is taking a new route. He is appealing to those beguiled Protestants who believe that Sunday was kept by the apostles. He wants to have the Protestants of America concur with the Sunday legislation.

Christ, Our Only Safety

Reader, do you see the signs that Jesus is coming very soon? Is it now time for us to ponder what Jesus did to save us from our sins? It is only as we contemplate that amazing mystery that we can possibly be drawn so close to Jesus in love, that we will stand in the mighty test.

I know of no passage of Scripture, in either the Old Testament or New Testament, what so wonderfully brings home to me what Jesus did in order that I might be saved, than Psalm 22. As I read this chapter, I am drawn to Christ in love because of the love that He first had for me. Because of this love, I want to keep His commandments and be prepared to meet Him. (John 14:15.)

These are Christ's words found in Psalms 22:1-19: "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring?

"O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

"But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

"Our fathers trusted in Thee: they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them.

"They cried unto Thee, and were delivered: they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded.

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him.

"But Thou art He that took Me out of the womb: Thou didst make Me hope when I was upon My mother's breasts.

"I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother's belly.

"Be not far from Me; for trouble is near: for there is none to help...

"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of My bowels.

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws; and Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death.

"For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet.

"I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me.

"They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

"But be not far from Me, O Lord: O my strength, haste Thee to help Me."

Each time I read that passage I feel so ashamed, for it was my sins that caused His suffering. My heart goes out in love to my Savior. I just so much want to meet Him face to face and thank Him for His matchless gift. I know that anything that I say in gratitude will be very, very inconsequential compared with what I ought to say, but maybe throughout eternity, I will be able to add to my gratitude as I express it to my Savior.

Jesus is coming soon! What we have just studied in these two apostolic letters and the alteration of course the Papacy is now taking, is evidence beyond dispute that everything is coming to the climax of Scripture. I pray, dear reader, that you will be ready, with your family, to meet our dear Savior when He comes.