

THE LEADERSHIP OF AN ENTIRE CONFERENCE
HAS DECIDED TO GET RID OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Ohio Conference vs. the Law of God

“From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends ‘in one point,’ manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes ‘guilty of all.’ James 2:10.

“In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition . . .

“Thousands who pride themselves upon their wisdom and independence regard it as an evidence of weakness to place implicit confidence in the Bible; they think it a proof of superior talent and learning to cavil at the Scriptures and to spiritualize and explain away their most important truths. Many ministers are teaching their people, and many professors and teachers are instructing their students, that the law of God has been changed or abrogated; and those who regard its requirements as still valid, to be literally obeyed, are thought to be deserving only of ridicule or contempt.”

— *Great Controversy* 582-583

This is the story of an entire conference that is headed toward disaster. And it seems that no one else in responsibility either knows what is happening or cares enough to stop it.

They will now; for copies of this report will be sent to leading officers of the North American Division and to the General Conference. We must do what we can to save our church.

Unfortunately, the president of at least one conference has decided to set the plan in motion, the secretary of the conference is working closely with him on the project, and it is with difficulty that any conference pastor dares to resist their will.

(However, I understand that a number of pastors in that conference continue trying to uphold our historic beliefs.)

We do well to consider the following narrative closely; for the story of how one entire Adventist conference in the U.S. is slowly crumbling to pieces is the pattern for how it may already be starting elsewhere.

Here are the people and places primarily involved in this remarkable story:

Timothy Arnett is the head elder of the Willoughby, Ohio, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Chester Hitchcock is pastor of that church.

Raj Attiken is the president of the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. (We are told that he is from Sri Lanka; his name is pronounced, “Raj Attikuhn”).

Hubert Cisneros is the Secretary of the Ohio Conference (pronounced “Ciz-NAR-os”).

Madison Seventh-day Adventist Church is the other church in the district which Hitchcock also pastors.

The town of Willoughby is located in the far northeast part of Ohio, close to Lake Erie and a little east of Cleveland. The community of Madison is farther east.

The Ohio Conference, organized in 1863, has, as of fall 2002, 88 churches and a membership of 11,683. In an effort by the North American Division (NAD) to increase membership, the late 1980’s celebration church plan of band music, entertainment, skit theatricals, and other novelties has done little to bolster up sinking church membership. The mid-1990’s church planting project (designed to separate new celebration congregations from established historic ones which tend to reject them) is not accomplishing much either. The objectives of both worship patterns were to sidestep historic Adventist concerns about obedience to laws and standards—as a means of bringing in a flood of new, paying members who would not want to be bothered with such legalistic practices.

Now, a third method is being set in motion, involving a conference-wide apostasy against the law of God. Whether by his personal decision or as a plan that is being closely watched by church leaders on higher levels in order to gauge its success, we do not at present know. It would seem unbelievable that this

is occurring in an entire conference with 49 credentialed ministers, without word of it reaching higher levels. But we will assume they are ignorant of a single conference president's determination to radically alter the historic beliefs of an entire conference constituency.

The measure of success will be if the changeover can be effected without losing too many members.

President Raj Attiken has embarked on a bold new approach, to make the church more inviting to people who walk in off the street. His plan is simple enough. In order to accelerate the inroads of the core new theology teaching, that the law of God has been abolished—Attiken is requiring conference pastors to teach and practice the belief that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross and none today need keep the Seventh-day Sabbath holy!

It has been recognized for quite some time that it is our so-called “legalistic” teachings that keep the half-converted from walking in off the streets and regularly attending our churches.

Attiken's plan, a premonition of a trend gradually spreading throughout our churches, worldwide, strikes at the heart of “the problem.”

The conference president is greatly aided in his project by an ever-increasing generation of pastors who were indoctrinated into new theology concepts at our colleges and the Seminary at Andrews, and a growing number of church members who have been brought into the church during very short evangelistic campaigns—and were never grounded in the faith, the standards, or the Spirit of Prophecy, having been taught little about any of them.

Unfortunately, upon discovering the new emphasis on the local church level, Attiken's plan is eagerly accepted by many church members who can breathe a sigh of relief, that they no longer need hide the fact that they neither keep the Sabbath properly nor want to.

However, I can assure you that, if leadership permits him to continue with his plan (while Attiken's project may succeed in destroying historic Adventism throughout our churches in the large state of Ohio), he will not have success in attracting hordes of new members—for two simple reasons:

First, Adventists would need to switch to Sunday worship services in order to attract people off the streets who have few principles and only live for entertainment and self-indulgence. The worldly view Sabbath church meetings as ridiculous.

Second, they will fail in this objective because the closer that Adventism apes the modern Protestant teachings of the other churches, the more it becomes just another “look-alike” church. Why should newcomers bother to attend the local Adventist church, when it is no different than the more popular and “respect-

able” denominations down the block?

To this I will add a third: I can assure you that God can—and will—scatter quicker than corrupt Adventist leaders think they can gather. It is the great Lawgiver who is being insulted by what is taking place.

Normally, I would not give all these extraneous details. Instead, I would abridge all this heavily. However, there is a decided advantage of letting you read how an apostate pastor, with the help of his conference president, eliminated the opposition and took over a church. Having read this, you may be better prepared, when this crisis comes to your local congregation.

ONE PASTOR TELLS HIS STORY

In order to show you the seriousness of the problem, I will begin with updates I received within the last week from Tim Arnett.

First, Tim met a pastor in another conference who, within the last two years, considered transferring into the Ohio Conference. After learning the conditions of employment he would have to accept if he accepted the call, he declined it. Here is the letter he sent:

“I received a call from the Ohio Conference secretary, Elder Hubert Cisneros, to come out to Ohio and pastor one of seven churches. Two of the choices were ___ and ___. **During my phone interview with Elder Cisneros, I came to realize what direction the Ohio Conference wants to take their churches.**

“They are these:

“1 - **Stop using the hymnal and replace it with modern Christian music.**

“2 - **Teach that the decalogue and the Levitical law were all one law.** (This was especially emphasized.)

“3 - **Suppress Christian reform in the area of dress; i.e., wear all the jewelry you want.**

“4 - **Minimize the Sabbath.**

“5 - **Abandon important pillars of the church.**

“6 - **Try to bring more people in with a use of lax rules and more entertaining elements.**

“The things Elder Hubert was saying to me were an abomination. They totally usurp Biblical standards and Spirit of Prophecy admonishments and counsel.

“On one hand, I could come out and try to work a congregation back to the Bible; however, I would have a life of frustration and constant battles with the conference administration. **And I know full well that they will relieve pastors of their duties if the pastors don't go the direction that the conference administration wants the conference to go.**

“On a side note: There is an elder from the Ohio Conference who was told by a conference officer that they, the conference administration, are waiting for the old conservatives to die off; so they can move the churches in a new direction. This was referred to as a

'paradigm shift.' That is sick.

"Well, I thought you would be interested in this since you had stood up for Biblical truth against the same people who want to hire me.

"In His service,

" _ _ _ ."

HOW TO GET RID OF A CHURCH

In a phone conversation with Tim, he told me that Chester Hitchcock (the Willoughby church pastor you will read about below) destroyed the Ash-tabula Seventh-day Adventist Church before coming to Willoughby. Hitchcock was trying to drastically lower the standards and was determined that everyone there recognize him as the "spiritual leader of the church." Before he had finished trying to modernize the doctrines, the church of 30 members had been reduced to two. The rest started a separate group. When that happened, the conference president decided to sell the church, to help support the conference office. Getting rid of church members is a handy way to increase conference profits, when the building is sold.

Tim said he has spoken with an older pastor in the Ohio Conference, who told him there were a number of pastors trying to resist the conference pressure to let down the standards and stop preaching the historic beliefs. He said he was told by President Attiken that he was being "too conservative" in his pulpit preaching. So far, he had not been fired or transferred out of the conference.

Prior to becoming conference president, Attiken was conference secretary. During a mini camp meeting in Cleveland several years ago, he told the church members that if they disobey God's appointed ministers, they are committing the rebellion of Korah. It is the leaders who are to make the decisions; and the people are to follow their directions.

TIMOTHY ARNETT'S NARRATIVE

The following narrative of events is provided by Timothy Arnett, an Adventist since 1982 and head elder of the Willoughby Seventh-day Adventist Church. He kept a careful diary of events over a period of nine months, from January through August 2001, with a concluding note in April 2002. This was followed by a conversation the present writer had with Tim in mid-October 2003, in which he disclosed additional facts, already mentioned.

Everything, below, that Tim says will be in quotation marks. My interspersed comments will be in brackets. Some punctuation and grammatical corrections and clarifications have been made. In order to conserve space, a small part of his story has been shortened. All the single words and phrases in bold print are Tim's while most of the full sentences in bold are ours. Subheads are ours.

"The Organized Apostasy and Tearing Down of the Faith in Seventh-Day Adventism

"Introduction: To the faithful brethren of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

"The following is a chronological sketch of the events as they occurred in 2001-2002 at the Willoughby Seventh-day Adventist Church. This record was faithfully kept in a date/address book by me, Elder Timothy Lee Arnett, and documented here. It is my hope that by reading this rather lengthy history covering almost one year that the reader will fear lest his or her local church will fall into a similar snare. Our enemy is not one another. We are the Lord's brethren. The enemy is not the 'conference brethren versus the laity,' because the Lord Himself nowhere designates a hierarchy in His remnant church. No, clearly the enemy is as always the Devil and Satan who is transformed into an angel of light. And he as well as his ministers will come as wolves in sheep's clothing right into our churches in order to draw away disciples after themselves. We've been forewarned to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation . .

GOD'S LAW IS OUR FOUNDATION BELIEF

"Praise to our God, the Lord, for the Bible, which is our rule of faith and practice. And thanks be to God for the *Testimonies to the Church*, which not only forewarned us of the apostasies in the last days, but also has given counsel concerning sin in His church which is to be holy even as He is Holy. Our High Priest, Jesus, who still works on behalf of His saints in the investigative judgment, knows our trial through which we pass.

"It is my prayer, that all members of the Willoughby Seventh-day Adventist Church who know the truth for our time and the event through which we are now passing will hold fast the pure doctrine that He has given unto us. I was present, when brother George Vandeman last preached at the Ohio Conference campmeeting, years ago, He asked the question, 'Are we still the people of the Book?' The scripture he referred us to was Revelation 12:17, '**And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**' I didn't understand the true import of that question then, as I do today. We are the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and at one time that meant something, but not any longer as you will see . .

[At this point, Tim quotes the Fourth Commandment, as it appears in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.]

"The *Adventist Review* shared a story on the Worldwide Church of God, which was infiltrated by professed evangelicals spreading their doctrines, dividing them, and convincing their leaders to give up on the

sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath.

[This is an important point: Although the WWCG taught many errors, its founder, Herbert Armstrong, emphasized the keeping of the Bible Sabbath. Very soon after Armstrong's death, a new, liberal leadership took over—and abolished Sabbathkeeping and other "legalisms." Over half of the members left, and WWCG is today a broken shell, fading away. Now just another look-alike Protestant church, it has no distinctive message to offer anyone.]

A fundamental issue in the ongoing apostasy is whether God's moral law is still binding on mankind.]

"Does the Lord have one moral standard for the Jew and another for the Gentile, or did He save by works in Old Testament times and by faith in the new? These questions are being asked by our church members because of the infiltration of our churches by the same individuals who helped destroy the WWCG. These apostates are **here, now** in our ranks, and in our pulpits.

"Our faithful Seventh-day Adventist pastors, evangelists, and teachers quote **Malachi 3:6** which says, 'For I am the Lord, **I change not**; therefore ye sons of Jacob are **not consumed**.' They preach and teach logically, that if God could have changed the Ten Commandments then Jesus wouldn't have had to die. Amen? [Do you agree?] The holy standard of truth inside the Bible is what we believe. Amen? If it is altered, then we will suffer for it both now and later as a church. See **Psalms 89:34**. 'My covenant will I not break, **nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips**.' See also **James 1:17**. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is **no variableness, neither shadow of turning**.' Contrast the unchanging character of God [in comparison] with that of man, as found in **verses 6-8**. Verse 6: 'But let him ask in faith, **nothing wavering**. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea **driven with the wind and tossed**.' Verse 7: 'For **let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord**.' Verse 8: 'A **double minded man is unstable in all his ways**.'

"Compare the reference of being **driven with the wind and tossed** with **Ephesians 4:11-15**. 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, **tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine**, by the

sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.' Spiritual gifts are given to men to build us up in the faith, not tear it down!

"What happened with the truths of God that were hammered out on the Bible—the Anvil of Truth—by the pioneers, and reemphasized by the Spirit of Prophecy? We were blessed to have a prophet in our midst, which assisted our forebears in the way they should go. **Today however we have a new breed of pastors, teaching the people to walk contrary to the faith once delivered to the saints.**

" 'In this day, God has called **His church**, as He called ancient Israel, to stand as a **light in the earth**. **By the mighty cleaver of truth** (the messages of the first, second, and third angels), He has separated a people from the churches and from the world, to **bring them into a sacred nearness to Himself**. He has made them the **depositories of His law**, and has committed to them the **great truths of prophecy for this time**. Like the holy oracles committed to ancient Israel, these are a **sacred trust** to be communicated to the world.' "—*Signs, January 25, 1910, para. 11.*

"**The man of sin, the son of perdition seeks to change God's times and laws. God does not change. Antichrist will seek to change. He will oppose God and all that is called God or that is worshipped. 2 Thessalonians 2:4, Daniel 7:25, Revelation 13:1-10.** We have in the Bible a faithful record of the history of God's people from Adam to the remnant of the woman's seed, which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Simply read it as it was delivered to you, and you'll find the will of God on any issue of life.

"Paul said, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." **1 Thessalonians 5:23**. He also said the Word of God would profit us in regards to "instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." **2 Timothy 3:16, 17.**

"Obviously the Bible was given into the hands of man to allow him to become a partaker of the divine nature in and through Christ. All things are for our sakes. See **2 Corinthians 4:13-15**. **But what do we do with the "all things?"**

THE CONTROVERSY BEGINS

"At a **January** [2001] potluck, Pastor Chester Hitchcock frankly expressed his view of Sabbath observance and stated that he goes to restaurants for fast food etc. on the Sabbath. People comment to one another

Ohio Conference vs. the Law of God

**PART TWO
OF FIVE**

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

and eventually word gets around to me. [He later admitted that he eats out, buy groceries, etc., every Sabbath.]

“Wednesday, **February 7:** Before prayer meeting, I talked with Chester concerning the gossip going around about him going out to restaurants on the Sabbath. He says it is true and he believes that **it’s okay for him to do so**, because he visits people and gets hungry, and therefore he feels justified in getting something to eat since he is doing the Lord’s work. At this point, I did not engage in any further discussion, I simply wanted verification from him. **(This was my first meeting alone with the pastor.)**

THE FEBRUARY OASIS MEETING

“Tuesday, **February 27:** Oasis Study* of Sabbath activities at the Madison Church. The meeting began with the Pastor asking the Oasis group this question: ‘Can anybody show me any place in the Bible where it is unlawful to buy or sell on the Sabbath day?’ (It was evident that this was meant to be a rhetorical question, not one to be answered). Tim Arnett responded with, ‘Yes, I can. Nehemiah speaks against buying and selling on the Sabbath day.’

“*Oasis Study was a study generated by the pastor to study particular issues within Adventism. It must be noted that after this Madison O.S. meeting we never had another.

[Hitchcock was probably planning to use these “Oasis studies” to indoctrinate the members into apostate Protestantism; but, discovering one person present who knew the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, he stopped holding the meetings. My message to you: Learn your Bible and Spirit of Prophecy; your test is coming! . . .

At this juncture in his report, Tim provides a lengthy Bible study on Sabbath obedience and violations in the Bible, based on Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-22; Jeremiah 17:19-27; Ezekiel 8:1-18; Isaiah 58:13-14; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 28:1-68; Daniel 9:1-23; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Hebrews 10:26-31.]

“At that meeting, the Pastor allowed no time for an in-depth study of the passages in Nehemiah concerning Sabbath observance, but continued to present his personal views of the proper way to observe the Sabbath using his self-made outline as a study aid. He presented hypothetical situations to explain his views, such as: ‘Would you go into K-mart if your pants were ripped to buy another pair? Is it okay to buy zoo tickets on another day and use them on the Sabbath?’ Although he believed that going to K-mart for pants was in accordance with proper Sabbath observance, he questioned the group as to whether purchasing a

ticket on another day and using it as entrance to the zoo on the Sabbath was the same as using money. He views a ticket and money as the same thing. It was clear that he was intending to steer the group in one direction—his, and that we were not going to engage in a meaningful Bible study on this topic.

“He further stated that he had no problem with grocery shopping during the Sabbath hours, particularly if he had been giving Bible studies all day Friday and hadn’t had a chance to shop. Another situation that he referenced was that of receiving his Conference paycheck once a month. He explained that, at times, his paycheck might arrive on Friday or on the Sabbath and he is compelled to grocery shop during the Sabbath hours if there is no food in the house. Some of the group’s comments included such recommendations as: he could borrow food/money from the church or make known his needs or wait until Saturday night to shop, etc. He stated that Jesus ate fast food on the Sabbath, comparing Jesus and the disciples eating grain to him purchasing fast food on the Sabbath . . .

[At this point, Tim gives a brief Bible study, quoting Matthew 12:1; Luke 6:1; 1 John 2:6; Colossians 2:6; and Luke 4:6.] . . .

“The Pastor claims that stopping at Burger King for a hot sandwich while traveling between churches, Bible studies, etc. is a real blessing, and is in accordance with Sabbath-keeping because he is employed in the Lord’s work.

“But the pastor is not following the Bible pattern. Jesus said that in regards to the Sabbath law, **as God gave it**, they were in fact **guiltless** when they plucked grain and ate it. They were not making a purchase at a fruit/vegetable stand as in the days of Nehemiah or being served by a waitress in a restaurant. They were hungry and plucked off grain to eat. They made an obvious effort to satisfy their hunger because sadly the members of the synagogue, where they had recently left, wouldn’t minister to their needs. There will be no confusion on this issue if we read the Word, and follow the Word, Jesus Christ . . .

“At the Oasis meeting, several people offered alternative suggestions for a Sabbath meal. Some of the following suggestions included: Why don’t you pack a lunch? Church people could take turns packing you a lunch; etc. It was also noted that there is one Sabbath a month when the pastor is at Willoughby for both the service and potluck, while Madison has a potluck meal **every** Sabbath, therefore there is **always** a place to get a Sabbath meal. I know that either church would be more than happy to prepare Cathy a plate also. To these comments, the Pastor only responded with a laugh, and no comment . . .

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“At this meeting, it was obvious that **most** of those present were not in agreement with the Pastor’s views. His response was, ‘Well, let us agree to disagree.’ This was a phrase we would hear repeatedly in the future, when long-standing doctrinal beliefs were called ‘traditions of Adventism’ and openly challenged by leadership.

[A majority were opposed to intentional Sabbath-breaking when the pastor first began indoctrinating members; but ultimately, because the apostasy was not strongly met and resisted, many eventually compromised while still others came out of hiding and said they had been secretly Sabbath-breaking all the time. So it must be all right.]

PASTOR FIRST BEGINS BLAMING ARNETT

“There was no uproar at this meeting, only passionate dialogue concerning his “new” views on Sabbath observance. What did he expect? He later tried to convince the Willoughby Church members that there had been some kind of outbreak at this meeting, and that several people came to him after the meeting ‘to apologize for Tim’s behavior.’ Tim was no more or less adamant about expressing his opinion than anyone else. As a matter of fact, most seemed to be in disagreement with the Pastor’s views, and one person distributed a study about what the Bible and Ellen White has to say about Sabbath observance. The study was basically ignored and we were presented with “opinions” rather than facts. (*Valerie, Tim’s wife, wrote this paragraph.*)

[At this early date, Hitchcock began casting blame on others, to divert attention from his apostate teachings.]

“The following are comments made by two Madison church members regarding the Oasis Meeting: Sandy Brock, a Madison Church member, had attended the Oasis meeting and I knew she would not hold back telling me the honest truth concerning any disturbances at the meeting. Sandy said she didn’t recall any loud voices. In her own words she said, ‘I didn’t hear any one voice above another.’ I guess that would mean two or more people weren’t shouting over another to be heard.

“Next, I’ll share remarks made by Robert Zaidinski who said, ‘Actually **the Pastor got pretty defensive when brothers and sisters used the Bible to defend proper Sabbath observance and how the Bible clearly states that there should be no buying or selling on the Sabbath day.**’ The brother also stated that in his opinion, ‘The Pastor caused more confusion in the meeting, rather than grounding us in the truth of God’s Holy Word’ . . . Brother Bob’s main concern: ‘We are living in the last days right before Jesus is to return. And many are going to lose out on knowing what the real truth is if the Pastor uses other than Biblical sources to teach with.’

TRYING TO CHANGE OUR BELIEFS

“At a later church meeting, the Pastor would admit to enjoying going out to eat on the Sabbath for pleasure, and not in conjunction with doing the Lord’s work. He stated at the Madison Church that he goes out nearly every Sabbath day. He expressed that he was under a lot of pressure and stress having to care for the household, because of his wife’s illness, and therefore enjoyed eating a hot sandwich and taking Cathy a milk shake on the Sabbath. Ask Lisa Salamone about her mother Dorothy, whom she cares for seven days a week. Ask her if she excuses herself for a shake on the Lord’s Day

“Let it be understood by all, that **the controversy surrounding this ‘Sabbath Observance’ issue has been introduced and manufactured deliberately and intentionally by Pastor Hitchcock in an effort to somehow change—or stamp out—our so-called ‘legalistic’ Adventist views.**

“He knew that, as a Pastor, his personal views on these discussed issues would hold a lot of clout and be adopted by most as sound doctrine. Wake up people! He has taken advantage of his position to impress upon you his personal ideas and influence your decisions without benefit of sound Bible truth. If you want to know who is behind the division in the church, look no further than to who stands at your pulpit.

“I have in my possession a two-cassette tape called *The Seventh Day*. The speaker is Chuck Missler. In his series lasting two hours, he covers nearly every scripture in the Bible on the subject of the Sabbath, the law of God, and the work of the cross. What scares me is that what he says mirrors Pastor Hitchcock’s doctrines!

“Who is Chuck Missler? Known as ‘an authority on the Bible worldwide,’ he is an evangelical Sunday-keeping minister who believes Seventh-day Adventists are legalistic and that we don’t understand Colossians 2:14-17. Why? Because we don’t understand what Jesus did at the cross.

SECOND MEETING ALONE WITH THE PASTOR

“Wednesday, **March 7:** Following prayer meeting, Chester [Hitchcock] and I met alone to discuss his Sabbath views. [Remember that, at this time, Tim was the head elder of the Willoughby Church.] He brought a paper, ‘*Thus saith the Lord*’ with him. At this time I shared with Chester that many members of the Willoughby Church had grown fearful of his personal views of Sabbath observance. After all, he is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

“I also warned of impending Conference calls which I counseled our members not to do at this time. He thanked me for this.

“He then said, ‘If anyone has a problem with my teachings, have them speak to me one-on-one about it.’

1 [As the story continues, you will gradually recog-
1 nize that Pastor Hitchcock is in close conversation
8 with someone at the conference office, who is guiding
2 how he should respond to complaints. You will learn
that he is using a loophole in church rules, in order
to prevent the members from calling a constituency
meeting and protesting to the conference office.]

“At this point in the conversation, I could not believe the Pastor’s attitude was one of indifference, and so I told him that I believed that this was an issue that had become a great stumbling block in our congregation and that his views were in error. He then told me that I should pursue Matt. 18. **He also said to me that many people in our churches were eating out on the Sabbath, as well as some of the elders. Some, he said, had made comments that they were set free now** and that they felt like they had formerly lived a double-life, always hiding the fact that they were eating at restaurants on the Sabbath. I was in shock that an Adventist pastor would instruct me to begin disciplinary steps against him, and that he is aware of elders who agree with his theology and do the same things he does on the holy Sabbath.”

[Hitchcock was saying that his doctrinal position was right, not because of what the Bible says, but because it helped people feel free from the burden of Sabbathkeeping.

Hitchcock maintained that everyone must “follow Matthew 18” and speak to him personally while being careful to permit no one to take the next two steps and have two speak to him together, followed by a “tell it to the church” in a constituency meeting.

But there is a Scriptural point involved here which Tim was not aware of. It is this: **Matthew 18:15-17 only applies to secret sin, not public sin.** What Hitchcock was doing, in his various meetings, was publicly disclosing—and teaching—sin; and it is threatening the welfare of the church. In such cases, 1 Timothy 5:20 applies. Hitchcock was not secretly smoking behind his barn; he was openly teaching error. **Here is the inspired statement clarifying this:**

“Her husband seemed to feel unreconciled to my bringing out her faults before the church, and stated that if Sister White had followed the directions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 he should not have felt hurt: ‘Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.’

“My husband then stated that he should understand that these words of our Lord had reference to cases of personal trespass, and could not be ap-

plied in the case of this sister. She had not trespassed against Sister White. But **that which had been reprov'd publicly was public wrongs which threatened the prosperity of the church and the cause.** Here, said my husband, is a text applicable to the case: **1 Timothy 5:20: ‘Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.’**

“The brother acknowledged his error like a Christian and seemed reconciled to the matter.”—2 Testimonies, 15-16.]

“Monday, **March 19:** We had the first Elders/Deacons/Deaconess meeting, at which Elder Hitchcock said all officers should have in their possession a copy of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* and the *Elders, Deacon or Deaconess Manual*. This would prove to be very helpful in gathering information on how to deal with our escalating problem at Willoughby. **Immediately I gained possession of a new copy of the Church Manual. I read and studied it cover to cover,** highlighting every topical statement relative to what responsible action could and should be taken to remedy our local church problem.

ARNETT SPEAKS UP IN CHURCH

“Sabbath, **March 24:** I was compelled during the praise and prayer time to petition prayer for our congregation. I said, ‘It has come to my attention that there is a new custom of going out to eat on the Sabbath day. I ask all church members to open their Bibles and prayerfully seek the Lord’s will in this matter.’ After the prayer time was over, the church Treasurer, John Huffman, approached me with an unhappy look which he expressed my way as he threw a piece of paper into my lap while passing by in the outer aisle. It simply read ‘Romans 14:12, 13.’ I recall that he had stood with his arm around the pastor smiling, shaking his hand and talking about something. I’m not sure about whom the note was from.

[“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”—Romans 14:12-13.]

“Sunday, **March 25:** My wife and I went out to dinner with Debbie Pierce and Jim and Lisa Salamone. Afterward, I was compelled to drive up the street to the Huffman’s to visit Brother John concerning the note. They invited me in and I asked John after a time to explain what it was in Romans 14 that I should consider.

“John seemed reluctant to make any comment about it, and so I shared with him and Barb that there was a Sabbath issue that was only between myself and the Pastor that revolved around being served food and buying and selling on the Sabbath. I told John that he shouldn’t apply the Romans 14 chapter to this matter. I knew it did not, in any way, relate to the

Lord's Sabbath day. John and Barb both expressed their personal views to me, to which I gave ear. John said the Sabbath law said that only the people in 'thy house' were to rest on the Sabbath. I then saw that I should leave educational material for him to review. I left a pamphlet, prayed for them and their family and returned to the restaurant.

THIRD MEETING ALONE WITH HITCHCOCK

"Sunday, **April 1**: Upon my request, I met with Elder Hitchcock to discuss his views on Bible doctrine. At this meeting, I shared with him what the *Church Manual* had to say about not using the 'pulpit as a forum' to present views that aren't in harmony with our established doctrinal platform. I shared from the Spirit of Prophecy that we should consult others who have experiential knowledge of the truth, and lay it (our view of what we consider to be new light) before them to see if it has any merit. Sadly, our meeting was unprofitable.

"Chester said I should follow Matt. 18. But he then said to me quite emphatically, **'I will not appear before the local Church Board. I will only appear before the Ohio Conference committee!'** And then he added to my astonishment, **'And I know that they will support me 100%!**' This statement, whether true or not, planted a seed of fear, not of the Conference, but of the possibility that my labors at the local level would be overshadowed by the Pastor's confidence, not in the Word of God but, in the arm of flesh.

"Tuesday, **April 3**: I met Mike Eitutus at church to prepare for my Sabbath School Class and talked about Sabbath observance and what the pastor had been preaching. I warned Mike not to follow any one man's view on so important an issue. I offered to study the Sabbath with him.

LAW NAILED TO THE CROSS

"Wednesday, **April 4**: Prayer meeting was a disaster. **The Pastor's lesson taught that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross.** This topic was again preached at one of the Revival Meetings.

"My personal friend, Helen Konoronski, was at this prayer meeting. She was my neighbor who lived across the street from me when I was young. She also attended my first Revelation Seminar at my mother's home back in 1984. **During the lesson, the Pastor read the following statement, 'The Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross.'** I was shocked at this statement, because up to this moment, I never knew he taught this doctrine and because my friend, Helen, was nodding in agreement. I said to Helen, 'Helen don't shake your head up and down unless you know what you are being told.' **I said, 'The Ten Commandments were not nailed to the cross!'** Pas-

tor Hitchcock then rebuked me and said, 'Tim let's agree to disagree' and, 'Tim you must respect my opinion!'

FOURTH MEETING ALONE WITH HITCHCOCK

"After the meeting we met alone, and the Pastor rebuked me again and gave me a book by Martin Webber called *Who's Got the Truth*. He told me that if the theologians of our church can't agree on what is truth, we shouldn't have disagreements either. I replied, 'Our church (SDA) has never taught that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross.' "

"This was my fourth and final meeting alone with the pastor.

[Keep in mind that it can be dangerous to meet alone with an apostate more than once at the most. He can falsely allege that you said or did things which were not right. It is best to have a witness with you.]

"This more than fulfilled Matthew 18:15, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." He did not hear me; therefore I have not gained my brother.

"From January until this date, **April 4**, I had met with the pastor privately and alone on four separate occasions to discuss the following points. Having followed the counsel of our Lord in Matthew 18:15, *I declare these three faults exist between myself and Pastor Hitchcock:*

"1. **Proper Sabbath observance** according to Scripture.

"2. **Departing from the established doctrinal views** of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and not following *Church Manual* instructions, entitled "*The Pulpit Not a Forum*," page 205.

"3. **The Ten Commandments were not nailed to the cross**, per Colossians 2:14-17.

"Concerning item #3, my comments are as follows:

" 'Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, **nailing it to His cross**. And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days. Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.' "—*Colossians 2:14-17*.

"I challenge anyone to show from an Adventist publication, especially the Spirit of Prophecy, when, where, or if we ever taught what Elder Hitchcock teaches on this doctrine that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross. **Look in our publications. Wouldn't it be confusing for the person who's been taught that**

Ohio Conference vs. the Law of God

**PART THREE
OF FIVE**

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

only the ceremonial law was nailed to the cross to then come to Willoughby and hear that the Ten Commandments were also nailed to the cross?

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“Paul made a qualifying statement: He said, ‘. . . sabbath days . . . which are a shadow of things to come . . .’ The seventh day Sabbath predated the entrance of sin; therefore it could not be a type, which pointed forward to Calvary. In contrast, the Sabbath always pointed backwards as a memorial of creation. According to Hebrews 9:6-10, the ceremonial system was temporary in nature. The earthly temple service had all the obvious characteristics mentioned in Colossians 2:14-17 . . .

ANOTHER MEETING WITH HITCHCOCK

“At this time Ray Smithisler and Debbie Pierce had their first meeting with Elder Hitchcock according to Matthew 18, to discuss their concerns with him about his theology.

“Debbie had shared her concerns about the Pastor’s profaning of the Sabbath by going out to restaurants, etc. To which he replied: Some Adventists believe that people shouldn’t wear jewelry. This comment was directed at Debbie because of her cross ring. Debbie was perplexed and made to feel that she somehow should defend why she was wearing jewelry. She pondered, “Well, maybe I shouldn’t be wearing it.” **The Pastor then said he did not have a problem with jewelry.** She knew this, because he has said the same in his sermons. He then went on to add that he did not wear it, because he didn’t want to be a stumbling block. She reasoned curiously, ‘If he did not want to be a stumbling block about jewelry, then why choose to be one about the Sabbath?’ Willingly, he then proudly shared the fact that he and his brother, soon to become an ordained **Baptist** minister, would indeed be eating at a restaurant this coming week during the Sabbath hours. What a witness to a Sunday-keeping minister, especially from a Seventh-day Adventist pastor!

“This was Ray Smithisler’s and Debbie Pierce’s first meeting alone with the pastor, fulfilling Matthew 18:15.

ONLY PERMITTED TO SPEAK TO HIM ALONE

“Let it be noted, that Elder Hitchcock never allowed Matthew 18:16 to be followed with these two church members. At later public meetings he said, ‘If anyone wants to talk with me alone that will be fine, but there will not be anymore group meetings.’ Meaning no witnesses to accompany these members concerning their grievances with the Pastor. This further shows his neglect to the counsels of our Lord, with respect to offences between the brethren and

intent to cease all other grievances.

“Sabbath Service, **April 7:** The Pastor preached on the ‘*Secret Rapture*’ and said, ‘We must respect the views of our other brothers and sisters in Christ in **other churches.**’

“After this service, I talked with Elder Pat Berner about discussing Chester’s theology. It was at this time that Elder Berner revealed, by his response to my concerns, that he too had gone out on Sabbath and that ‘I shouldn’t be so smug as to think life is perfect.’ **He sounded exactly like the Pastor did when he shared all the hypothetical situations that could occur.** For instance, ‘What would you do Tim, wouldn’t you pull an ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath?’ I said to Pat that I understood the part of well doing, but profaning of the Sabbath and leading others by a poor example to follow our course is wrong. I was hoping that Elder Berner would be the first of the ‘one or two’ found in Matthew 18:16 and that he would hear why we needed to meet with the Pastor.

“Prior to the **April** business meeting, Debbie called the Pastor requesting that ‘unity’ be added to the business meeting agenda. The Pastor informed her that now was not a good time to discuss ‘unity’ because of the upcoming Revival Meetings. She felt this to be a rather odd response in light of all that was ensuing.

“Monday, **April 9:** I went to Willoughby Church to set up church remodeling proposals and overhead projector for the business meeting. At 6:30 the Pastor showed up and asked if we needed to talk again. I said no, because others and myself had talked with him about his private interpretations and opinions without any resolution. **Because of his comment, ‘that the Conference was behind him 100%,’ I said to him that any discussion from hereon would be futile if in fact the Conference was supporting his doctrinal position.** Following the business meeting, Elder Burner said for me, ‘to call the elders together to meet after church the following Sabbath, **April 14.**’

TRYING TO GET ANOTHER WITNESS

“Tuesday, **April 10:** I talked with Elder Valle Sjoberg about the elders’ meeting that Elder Berner scheduled to discuss Pastor Hitchcock’s theology. He said he did not know anything was wrong. Valle hadn’t been attending church because of gout and problems with his legs. However, he is an elder at our local church and needed to be made aware of the problems. With Valle, Elder Berner, and myself present, I would then have the ‘two or three witnesses to meet with the Pastor in fulfillment of the second meeting requirement in Matthew 18:16.

“Valle seemed surprised to hear about Chester’s Sabbath views and his belief that the Ten Commandments had been nailed to the cross. I encouraged him

to call the Pastor himself and ask him what his views were, since Chester is very open and willing to share his views. I asked Valle to get back in touch with me if he would or would not be attending the elders' meeting that Elder Berner had requested to be scheduled that coming Sabbath, April 14. Elder Sjoberg neglected to call me back, so I needed to find another 'witness.'

"Next, I called Elder Keene who indicated that he would be present at the meeting. To secure enough witnesses, in the event that Elder Keene could not make it to the meeting, I called on Ray Smithisler and Paris Layne. Paris Layne refused to attend the meeting. I told him, at this point, that for two months I had been trying to reconcile the Pastor's clear doctrinal differences with that of our Adventist Church's established historical positions. The reason I called Elders Layne and Smithisler was because both had served in the same capacity as I: first Elder. I hoped they would appreciate the predicament I was in. It was my wish to also keep this ordeal within the ranks of the overseers of the local church.

[Notice that while the pastor was busily indoctrinating church members, Tim was being very cautious about discussing the matter with many others ("telling it to the church") until he could get another "witness" for a meeting with the pastor. **The rest of the church members were puzzled as to what to do. Somehow, they felt that only the pastor could call meetings and present the topics to be discussed. All the while, the pastor was busily indoctrinating members.** But, because the pastor was, by his own statements, living in open sin, in accordance with 1 Timothy 5:20 and 2 *Testimonies*, 15-16, he should be reproved openly and in public.]

"Sabbath, **April 14:** Pat Berner was not in attendance at church or the elders' meeting due to company at his home. I then went to Paris Layne and Bill Hartman, both former elders, and asked if they would please hear my concerns about what was occurring in our church.

"They flatly refused and **Bill commented that as long as he has been a member of this church, he has known that Adventists eat out at restaurants on the Sabbath day. Russ stated that he also refused Tim's invitation to the meeting, fearing to insult the presently elected elders.** That was a decision he now regrets having made, as it might have affected others' decisions to get involved.

"And so Elder Keene, Ray Smithisler and I met in the basement. After we had prayer and I introduced the subject, **Elder Keene immediately went on the offensive and accused me of attacking and condemning the Pastor. Elder Keene claimed that none of us are perfect, and none of us can keep the Ten Commandments.** I then reminded him that the subject was whether or not that law was nailed to the

cross, and if it is okay to profane the Sabbath in restaurants and grocery stores. He refused to listen and Ray Smithisler was only able to make a comment, that love is the fulfilling of the law and that, if we love God, we can keep the law.

"We then closed the meeting after only twenty minutes. Obviously I couldn't then go forward to meet with the Pastor, in order to fulfill Matthew 18, because I didn't even have one of our current elected elders to go with me. Elders Pat Berner, Sonny Keene, and Valle Sjoberg, all refused from this day on to meet with me or discuss our local church problem.

[Rather consistently, when the crisis comes to your church, you will find that believers generally fall into just two classes: (1) those who, for one reason or another, fear to become involved and (2) a few who are willing to defend the King of the Universe and His Written Word, whatever it may cost them.]

ARNETT'S APRIL 20 SERMON

"Friday, **April 20:** Elder Hitchcock called me and said he cannot tell me what I should or should not preach, but that he would **advise** me against discussing the **Sabbath** issue.

"Sabbath, **April 21:** I taught on Daniel 3 for Sabbath School. After I dismissed my class with prayer, I asked to be alone. I had material for the sermon that Valerie and I had prepared back in February for the Oasis meeting. I was sitting there reviewing it. Suddenly a spirit of oppression came upon me, a true demonic influence. I cried out to my Lord Jesus for deliverance. Only after my third cry did I sense a full release. I was impressed at this time with the duty not to preach to the church on the **Sabbath issue**, but on the **authority** of the Holy Scriptures in 1 Timothy 4:1-8 and 2 Tim 4:1-5.

"I had five minutes to prepare this sermon and the Spirit of the Lord gave me utterance to speak for forty minutes. Sadly, Paris Layne walked out during my sermon. After the sermon, I asked Elder Berner why he failed to show up at the elders' meeting on the previous Sabbath, April 14. He did not offer an apology, but simply stated that he had company.

"Sunday, **April 22:** I received word that Sue Cope was discouraged about my sermon. I called her to find out why she was discouraged. She stated that it was, 'because of the bickering going on at the Willoughby Church.' I counseled her that she need not concern herself with these issues, because she was just now returning to church after being away many years. **She said we should just praise the Lord, and talk about salvation.** I asked her, 'What did Jesus save you from?' She replied that Jesus saved her so that she could go to heaven. I said, 'Heaven is our reward, but what did he save you from?' She did not answer. I never personally said anything to her about what she does on the Sabbath and we ended our con-

versation.

“That evening Dave Passerello, Sue Cope’s son, called me, wanting to take me out to dinner. I asked why, because I hadn’t talked to Dave in nearly five years. He hesitated, but then said I had upset his mother and that she called him up, crying on the telephone. I told him, ‘I haven’t the foggiest idea why she is upset. As a matter of fact, I thought we had a very nice discussion.’ **He then turned quite harsh and told me I have a ‘perfection problem’ or something.** I said to him then that he ought not worry about the problems at Willoughby since he is a member of the Chesterland Church. And I told him frankly that he had never indicated to me that he held any esteem, high or low, on the spiritual matters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He said he would pray for me, but I declined his offer.

WHO IS ANTICHRIST?

“Friday, **April 27:** The Revival Meetings began. Pastor Hitchcock’s sermon was titled, “*Who is Good Enough to be Antichrist?*” This sermon departed from clear Biblical interpretation of what the antichrist is. **The Pastor suggested that antichrist could be your wife, TV, good Bible doctrine, etc.**—Anything that we put in place of God. In reality, putting something in higher esteem than God is idolatry, whereas antichrist is clearly spelled out in the Scriptures. After the Revival Meeting, a group gathered to pray for the outpouring of God’s spirit of truth, the latter rain. Attendees: Lois J., Russ K., Debbie P., Helen K., Ray S., and Tim & Val A.

ANOTHER MEETING WITH THE PASTOR

“Sabbath, **April 28:** I handed out one of Pastor Doug Batchelor’s messages on questions about the *Sabbath observance and which law was nailed to the cross*, Col. 2:14-17. Elder Pat Berner also had a letter ready. It was for me—a letter of rebuke. A letter of rebuke, after he fails to attend an important elders’ meeting that he, himself scheduled. I left a message with Pat requesting that, at a later date, we sit down and discuss his letter. Since he mentioned Matthew 18, I told him he could not pursue this course until he and I sit down and have a chance to respond to his accusations.

“After church service, during potluck, Chester asked if we could meet together. I said, “sure,” assuming only he and I would meet. Then Elder Berner invited me to go upstairs. I asked Valerie, my wife, to accompany me. Members present were: Pastor, John H. (treasurer), Valerie A. (Tim’s wife), and Elders Paris L., Pat B., Sonny K., Russ K. and Tim A.

“At this meeting, I was rebuked for not following through with Matthew 18. **I stated to the elders and John Huffman that the Pastor was using the pulpit and other teaching opportunities to present doc-**

trines that are not the established views of the Bible and the Adventist Church. I had a *Church Manual* and read from the section entitled, ‘*The Pulpit Not a Forum.*’ I asked the elders whether or not the Pastor had ever talked about his views with any of them. **They were silent.** It must be noted that I have not heard of any Adventist Pastor, Elder, or Lay Minister who has ever taught that it was okay to eat out on Sabbath, for whatever reason, or that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross. These were clearly not positions held by our church.

“I was very upset at this charade. I was cornered and accused of not following Matthew 18 by those, who all along, were in opposition to my efforts to fulfill that very course in Matthew 18:16. **Clearly, the Pastor with certain elders had planned to shut me down.**

HITCHCOCK’S METHOD OF INDOCTRINATION

“**April 30:** Merrill Presslar requested that I come to his home to study Sabbath observance.

“**May 5:** I visited the Presslar home and had Bible study with the entire family. It was a real blessing. Merrill shared that Chester, **while giving the family Bible studies, would deliberately expound on the topic of Sabbath observance, continuously keeping this issue in the forefront.** He would relate instances concerning Sabbath activities he and others had engaged in. For example, **he would share how he had seen church members while in the grocery store on the Sabbath.** He expressed humor in how they would try to hide.

“Merrill expressed to Chester his concern, and that he really didn’t agree with what Chester shared in his Bible studies. Upon further reflection, Merrill shared that **the Pastor seemed to be trying hard to keep the issue of liberal Sabbath observance constantly in the forefront of his discussions.** Eventually, Merrill simply cut off any further offers for Bible study from Chester.

[**Notice the clever way this is done: The pastor is trying to induce the church members into just one sin: breaking the Bible Sabbath, knowing that once they do that, they, like him, will be living in sin—and no longer willing to give him trouble, as he next leads them into deeper apostasy.** This device is truly diabolic.

But, eventually a point will come (as it has in other modernist, new theology churches in Maryland, Colorado, Oregon, and elsewhere), where the pastor will lead the people entirely out of the denomination; something conference leaders were not expecting.]

ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT FULFILLING MATTHEW 18

“**May 7: I spoke to the Ohio Conference president, Raj Attiken, and asked him for counsel on**

how I should proceed with our local church problem. But I received no clear response. Afterwards, I spoke with Pastor Hitchcock about meeting me again with one or two witnesses, according to the Lord's direction in Matthew 18:16. The witnesses were to be Debbie Pierce, Ray Smithisler, and Merrill Presslar. These members had individually met with Pastor Hitchcock and discussed theological differences he had with the Bible, fulfilling step 1 of Matthew 18.

"Chester informed me that the 'men of experience' that had met on April 28, to rebuke me for not going to step 2 of Matthew 18, would be there as well. I did not understand why these men needed to be in attendance, and he was not willing to explain. This pastor-created format does not fulfill Matthew 18. However my witnesses were in attendance, thus fulfilling Matthew 18:16.

"May 11: I spoke again with President Attiken. Still nothing definite.

"Friday, **May 11:** For the Friday night meeting, I had prepared materials to support the Bible and Adventist Church position on Sabbath observance, and how the Ten Commandments have not been nailed to the cross. My materials also included Elder Hitchcock's Oasis lessons from Feb. 27 and the lesson, "*Was the Law Abolished at the Cross?*" which I believe clearly showed his position as totally opposite to that which I was presenting.

THE MAY 11 MEETING

"Members in attendance at this Pastor-promoted "debate" in the fellowship hall were: Tim, Val, Jacob, Melody Arnett, Russ and Jackie Koshel, Merrill and Michell Presslar, Lois Johnson, Ray Smithisler, Pat Berner, Sonny and Ellen Keene, Debbie Pierce, Paris and Lenora Layne. (I may have missed a few.)

"At this meeting, the Pastor stated that I was not following **Matthew 18**. Be it noted, that I had requested this meeting in fulfillment of Matthew 18:16. Therefore his remark is meaningless.

"Please remember also, that due to the insistence of the Board of Elders to disregard the Lord's directions months before, concerning faults between brethren, the time was delayed. At this time, I considered their presence at this meeting to not be in accord with restoring the church to unity, but rather an affront to Bible doctrine and the order that is to be maintained throughout the body of Christ. They refused to be witnesses, when I asked them to participate. And now, when I did have witnesses, they had come to further thwart the clear directions of Christ. Any man who esteems others better than himself thus fulfills God's will. But no man is above submission to God and His holy law. Matthew 18:16 says: 'But if he will not **hear**

thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may established.' It was the Pastor who had stated that the 'men of experience,' which included the elders and John Huffman (treasurer), were also to attend this meeting.

"At the conclusion of my presentation of Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, and historical Adventist materials which included J.N. Andrews' book on the law and the Sabbath, the Pastor, **refraining from either responding to my presentation or presenting his view, instead directed a frontal assault upon me** before all in attendance.

"I must say that I was not surprised and neither were the majority of people by the antics used at his proposed and planned 'Sabbath Observance debate meeting.' I had been warned, that as usual and customary, the Pastor (instead of taking the opportunity to 'prove' his personal views via the Bible) would resort to using his 'time' as a rebuking session where he intended to show how **Elder Tim Arnett does not respect his pastoral authority.**

[We must beware of those who, in a church dispute, refuse to study Bible / Spirit of Prophecy principles or imply that the authority of the church is above that of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. We are to value and respect the authority of the church, but God's holy writings are the higher authority. To say otherwise is to assume that frail, erring men are above God. All of our faithful leaders will agree that submission to God's Word takes precedence over submission to church authority.]

"The Pastor listed five or six items on the dry erase board that accused me of various character flaws, which amounted to nothing. This was another of his diversionary tactics . . .

"At the conclusion of his speech, questions were fielded from the congregation. Most of the comments were favorable toward my presentation. That is an undeniable fact. Elder Berner stated he believed both our presentations were well constructed, but did not comment on the substance of either. No other comments favorable to the Pastor's position were even spoken. And it should have **rung clear** to him that he may be in error; and that the right and true course would be to take a Biblical stand for the Sabbath, along with the clear established view that the law of Ten Commandments were not nailed to the cross. Remember! The process of Matthew 18 is to bring about reconciliation between God and man, man and man, and, in this case, Pastor and his church. This did not happen. **This would have more than fulfilled Matthew 18:15, 16 . . .**

Ohio Conference vs. the Law of God

**PART FOUR
OF FIVE**

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

THE SECOND MEETING

“The Pastor then called for a dismissal of all regular church members and for the elders to remain in attendance for a meeting. When the elders sat together, a totally different climate emerged. **The Pastor asked first whether we were going to request the Ohio Conference to become involved: to which all seven of the elders, unanimously, agreed. There was a vote that was motioned, seconded, and passed to ask the conference to assist us in the matter of Pastor Hitchcock’s doctrine that I was in opposition to.**

“(Ohio Conference policy regarding grievances against conference employees, which I later became knowledgeable of, stated that the local elders did not have to agree about the grievance against a conference employee. All they had to recognize, was that they were unable (at their level of church governing) to bring about reconciliatory harmony. Under such circumstances, it was just cause to then involve the conference in the local church issue.)”

I was in harmony with the church policy in asking the elders to assist me in this issue; however, Elder Hitchcock rebuked me for calling an elders’ meeting. He said, “Only the Pastor has the right to call an executive meeting of the elders.” As I stated, I had met with Elder Hitchcock on four separate occasions. Therefore I had to finally go to step two of our Lord’s counsel, to take witnesses to verify the concerns I had about his doctrines. The Scriptures clearly indicate the will of God, concerning an elder and his duties to the flock of God. I had seen and heard things, which were not in harmony with the truth as it is in Jesus, therefore I had to act. As Elder Hitchcock stated on Sunday, April 1st, **“I will not appear before the local Church Board. I will only appear before the Ohio Conference committee.”** Matthew 18:17 says, **“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”** The pastor neglected the Biblical and historical testimony I had presented, as well as the verification of those from the witnesses and other church members that were present on May 11th.

“Then the Pastor began reading comments out of the church manual about **surmising evil in respect to a brother. (See the Church Manual section entitled ‘Church Discipline.’)** Be it noted that the word, “surmise,” in the dictionary as well as the Bible means to guess at something. Myself and many church members are confused as to why the Pastor would charge me with surmising evil, when it is clearly evident that

his views are not in harmony with Adventist historical doctrine concerning the law and the Sabbath.

“We are not talking about interpreting prophecy or straining at a gnat of some obscure passage of scripture. **We are talking about the clear intent of the Ten Commandments, Sabbath observance, and whether or not any person, conference employee, or regular church member has the right to enter the sacred desk and dismantle established beliefs of our church.** There is no need to guess or surmise at his dissenting doctrinal views. The Pastor’s personal views are proudly spoken and upheld regardless of how negatively they have affected our local congregation.

“Once again, I witnessed the justification of self, the disregard of what others were trying to show him, and the lashing out against reproof for his sins. Elder Hitchcock just kept quoting references out of the *Church Manual* and directing them at my end of the table. I then asked him what he was doing? I reminded him, that I wasn’t the focus of this meeting. We had voted to involve the Conference committee; therefore the meeting should have then ended.

“Then, the Pastor said something that floored me, ‘Tim you will no longer preach in the pulpit of this church!’ I then stood up and said I will no longer sit here and listen to this. **I said we voted to bring the conference,** and I am leaving. I then walked over behind the table, where I had made my presentation, to gather my Bible and notes. **The pastor then shouted, ‘Who’s in the pulpit! Who’s in the pulpit!’** as he walked up to the table across from me. I replied, only loud enough for him to hear, ‘That’s okay because I still have a Sabbath School to teach and a Prayer Meeting to lead out in.’ To which he replied vindictively in word and character, ‘We’ll see about that!’ I left to return to my truck to put away my materials.

“The church members, who were milling around the outside the church, told me that I was being summoned back downstairs. As soon as I entered the room, Chester imperatively spat, **‘You will no longer preach, teach Sabbath School, or lead out in Prayer Meeting at this church!’** I replied to him, **‘You have no right to censure me. That can only be done in a church business meeting.’** At this, I departed.

[Keep that in mind: The censure of a member can only be done in a church business meeting, to which all the members are invited to attend.]

“The Pastor’s accusation against me was, ‘Tim Arnett is not following Matthew 18.’ Remember that according to the *Church Manual*, censoring can only be done after steps 1 and 2 have failed, and then it goes before the church for disciplinary action. The *Church Manual* declares, **‘An erring member may [only] be placed under censure by a vote of the**

church at any duly called business meeting of the church, provided the member concerned has been notified' (See page 183 bottom par.). Utter confusion had now come upon us.

[Tim was wise to know the *Church Manual* so well. The problem would be to get the business meeting called in session. The pastor would use every means of blocking it.]

SABBATH, MAY 12

"Sabbath worship, **May 12:** Before the church service, the pastor met in secret with the elders with a letter that supposedly originated at the elders' meeting the night before. Elder Sjoberg, not in attendance at the previous night's meeting, but present at church the next day, was drawn into this secret meeting to sign this letter which he said he **did not read** or understand the content of. He absentmindedly signed the letter. In his words, it was because his legs hurt and he desired to get off of them to ease his pain. I **have never received or seen a copy of this letter(s).**

"At the church service, the pastor chose to preach on the subject of the Sabbath, how he keeps it, and why he believes the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross. The Pastor stated (at least two times during his sermon, with a very authoritative tone) the following doctrinal statement: 'Going to restaurants on the Sabbath is not a sin! Let me repeat. Going out to a restaurant on the Sabbath is not a sin!'

[The pastor was obviously working feverishly to indoctrinate as many as possible into Sabbath-breaking, so when the final separation occurred, most of the congregation would have been grounded in law-breaking.]

"In disregard of the fact that the church members in attendance the previous night had expressed their disappointment with the Pastor for preaching and teaching these erroneous doctrines in our church, he obviously felt compelled to continue to repeatedly and dogmatically reiterate his personal stand.

"There were only four or five people at this worship service that had not been in attendance at the Friday night meeting. So what was he trying to do, other than punish further those who were in disagreement with him? I decided not to stay. I was quite discouraged and upset, as was my family and others. I must admit my hurt got the best of me, and I slammed the door in defiance to what Elder Hitchcock was doing in our local church. For this selfish act, I apologized and asked the Willoughby congregation to forgive me. His sermon at the Madison Church was a copy of this one at Willoughby. Plus at their church, the Pastor stated, 'I go out almost every Sabbath.' This statement shows the downward spiral that has occurred in his doctrinal position, because when he first shared his Sabbath view (at the February 27 Oasis

meeting), he said, 'I only go out to restaurants when I do gospel work.'

THE SIGNED PAPER

"After Sabbath that evening, I had two phone conversations, the first with Elder Keene. Elder Keene asked, 'Did you sign the paper today to get someone to come up?' I said, 'Signed what paper?' Sonny said, 'The elders are signing a paper to get the conference to come up and get together and sort this thing out.' I replied, 'I didn't see any paper, whatsoever.' I then called Elder Ray Smithisler and asked him what he knew about the paper that the Pastor had the elders sign. I related to him what Elder Keene had said. And Elder Ray Smithisler confirmed that he understood the paper to be such, and had added his signature the **previous evening.**

"My questions are these: When were these first and second documents composed: possibly, **before** the elders' meeting? If so, did the Pastor arrive prepared with a handy, ready-made document in his possession prepared for censuring purposes? There were six elders, including myself, at the Friday, May 11th meeting. All six were at the table when the Pastor told me I could no longer preach. While I was putting my stuff away in the truck, Elders Koshel and Smithisler went into the men's room. So that left Pastor Hitchcock, Elders Layne, Keene and Berner. In the time it took me to walk to my truck and back, my censure included, not only not preaching, but also not teaching Sabbath School and leading out in prayer meeting. The question is: Did they have sufficient time, or the authority for that matter, to discuss these issues?

"On Sunday evening, Pastor Hitchcock told me in a phone conversation what the letter(s) allegedly stated. He asked, 'Are you going to write this down?' I said, 'Yes.' He continued, 'Because Tim Arnett left the elders' meeting when we attempted to address the method he used in disagreeing with the Pastor. We feel that he should not preach or teach at the church until he is willing to submit himself to our counsel.' The Pastor should have followed Matthew 18:15 if he felt I was in error. Instead, I believe he used this opportunity (elders' meeting) for a continued assault on my character, which was an extension of the previous meeting.

[The pastor had neatly switched the subject from his erroneous doctrines, to something he perceived wrong in the first elder.]

"Monday, **May 14:** At the conclusion of the monthly business meeting, I met with the elders and the pastor to set up a date to talk with the elders. As we were standing together discussing a favorable time to meet, I asked to read from *Testimonies to Ministers* page 24-26, entitled "*Unity in Faith and Doctrine.*" This points out how our church doctrine was established through fervent prayer and investigation of the Scrip-

tures. Because there was so much opposition coming from my fellow elders (but not Elders Smithisler or Koshel) and especially the pastor, at first I asked and then I begged that we would follow this pattern to restore us again to unity.

“The date was set for Monday, May 21 at 6 p.m. Dear reader **I ask you as a fellow Seventh-day Adventist, do you fear studying the Scriptures in order to find out whether you are in the truth? Do you study them to find out whether that which is preached to you is truth?** Does full obedience to God’s Word matter to you anymore?”

“Sabbath, **May 19:** I taught Sabbath School on Daniel 6, about Daniel being thrown into the lion’s den. Significantly, my Sabbath School class was deleted from the bulletin. (The pastor’s wife is the bulletin secretary.)

THE MAY 21 MEETING

“Monday, **May 21:** I met with Pastor and elders Smithisler, Berner, Hartman, Layne, Koshel, and Keene . . .

[At the beginning of the meeting, the pastor stated that the conference had no formal list of “dos and don’ts. He then requested a vote on which the elders **“want to agree with the conference to not make a list [of what the members could and could not do on the Sabbath].” This diversionary tactic produced a lengthy argument,** with Elders Hartman, Berner, Keene, Layne and the Pastor on one side and Elders Arnett, Koshel, and Smithisler on the other. The pastor and Arnett did most of the arguing.]

“There was an obvious move toward suppression of the issue at hand and to attempt to sweep under the rug any and all further discussion about the Sabbath and Law issue. **The manufacturing of a do and don’t list was a ploy to confuse the issue, taking the focus off the topic of discussion and putting it on an erroneous idea** unsanctioned by anybody. As you can see, the idea for following the **pioneer method of finding out the truth** was shot down by the Pastor. It is clear that he knew his position could not hold up under the scrutiny of the Scriptures.

“At this time the meeting again turned to Elder Arnett and his unwillingness to not agree to work with, support, agree to disagree, nor respect the Pastor’s views. At this ‘closed’ meeting, I found it necessary to: (1) Rebuke Elder Hitchcock for profaning the Sabbath and by leading others in his preaching ministry and example to do the same; and for (2) departing from established Adventist doctrinal views. (3) I also rebuked some of the elders for blindly following the same course as the Pastor, and for not willingly engaging in open Bible study on any of these issues . . . I declared that they had allowed sin to be maintained in the church. I did so in an authoritative manner. I wasn’t out of control—I knew what I was doing and

why, at all times.

“**The Pastor then read a letter from Raj Attiken, our conference president in Ohio, relative to disciplinary actions against myself.** I then reached for the *Church Manual*, that Elder Smithisler had in front of him and firmly slammed it down on the table and addressed the Pastor. I asked, ‘Where does the *Church Manual* say that the conference has any **jurisdiction** in this matter [of whether I should be disciplined]?’

[Tim knew what was in the *Church Manual*.]

“If the Pastor is free from receiving any disciplinary action of his local Church Board, then why should I be disciplined from the Ohio Conference president who is working on behalf of his “conference employee” from the sidelines?”

“As I previously stated, no Matthew 18:15-18 steps had ever been initiated against me for any reason, so what were the grounds for discussing any actions against me?”

THE REQUEST FOR CONFERENCE ASSISTANCE

“On **April 28**, the Pastor and elders ganged up on me at the Elders Meeting, where I was rebuked for supposedly not following Matthew 18, which I’ve clearly shown, is false. Then, at the **May 11** meeting, I was censured **by the Pastor alone.**

“Another reason I asked this question was because **Elder Attiken had told me on two separate occasions, May 7 and May 11, that he would not be involved in this matter until the Board of Elders requested the conference to be involved.**

“—But read again the **Friday, May 11 entry, where the elders voted to request the conference’s assistance. Why was this voted mandate ignored? The reason is because Elder Hitchcock disregarded the elders’ vote for conference assistance, as I would later find out by a conversation with Elder Attiken.**

[At the time of that May 11 request, it would have been well if Tim had followed it up with one or more phone calls to the conference president, to verify that he had received the request and what he was going to do about it.]

“In lieu of the ‘assistance request’ letter, a misleading Pastor-generated impromptu letter stating that, ‘because Tim Arnett refused to sit with the elders, he could no longer preach and teach in the Willoughby Church,’ was signed by Elder Smithisler and one or two other elders at the Pastor’s prompting. I know Elder Koshel left in disgust and did not sign it. Elder Keene stated that he did not sign it. And prior to talking with Elder Keene, I did not know that this letter even existed. The following day at church, as stated previously, Elder Sjoberg, not having been in attendance for a couple of months and not at the previous evening’s meeting, also signed the letter and later admitted that he had not even read the letter

before placing his signature on it.

“As you may recall, the evening of May 11th, I had the phone conversation with Elder Keene when he asked whether or not I had signed, ‘the letter to ask the conference to come up and sort this thing out?’ This was not what Pastor Hitchcock read to me over the phone. And, to this date, I’ve never seen either of these letters . . .

JUNE MEETINGS

“Sabbaths, **June 2, 9, and 16:** I did not teach Sabbath School at Willoughby, hoping for reciprocity from the Pastor and the elders, although I did not agree with the Pastor’s punishment, censuring me from teaching and preaching. I then requested an elders’ meeting because Elder Koshel had talked with the Pastor. And he concluded that the Pastor’s punishment was simply due to not meeting with the elders. I knew this was a lie, but I desired to teach. My class had two persons who weren’t baptized members of our church. Therefore, for their sakes as well as my children and the rest of our class members, I was willing to attempt another meeting with the Board of Elders, to sort this thing out.

“Monday, **June 18:** At the elders’ meeting, the Pastor set the agenda once again. He shared that we should be kind, like the women in Philippi, and skirted around the fact that there were still unresolved problems. Near the conclusion of this elders’ meeting, I stated that I would continue to reprove sin because the problems were not being addressed in these Pastor-led meetings. The Pastor then stated that, ‘since I do not want to work in harmony with the church, I don’t get to teach or preach.’ He immediately had a closing prayer after making this statement.

[No vote had been taken to end the meeting.]

“As had been done at the two previous meetings on **May 11th and on the 21st**, manipulation was used to confine discussion and point the finger of fault upon the one who reproved the Pastor of his sins. It was at this meeting that the elders had all received the conference publication entitled, *Grievance Against the Pastor by an Individual or Group*.

JUNE 18 BUSINESS MEETING

[This was an important meeting, because nearly all the church members came to it, not just the elders. Although a majority of elders favored Sabbath-breaking, approximately half of the church members were opposed to the apostasy.]

“Monday, **June 18:** At the business meeting, I requested for the Pastor to include an item on the agenda to discuss the church’s role, as stated in the *Church Manual*, regarding censure. The Pastor declined. He

said, ‘The elders are taking care of this matter.’ All of the members, who had attended the Friday, May 11th meeting, had come to see why the first elder had been censured. Their chief desire, however, was to see how our obvious differences in doctrine could be resolved. This meeting, like the rest, was limited to one hour by the Pastor. Besides the minutes and the treasurer’s report, there were only four items to discuss. So there would have been more than sufficient time for the Pastor himself to explain why the first elder was clearly being censured, contrary to established gospel order in the *Church Manual* and why there was no resolution at this time over the doctrinal division in our local church.

“At the conclusion of this business meeting, many people were outwardly disappointed and verbally expressed strong emotions, because, for example, a full half hour was used to discuss Mt. Vernon Academy, but the Pastor did not allow even one second to be devoted to discussing our local church’s problems. **The Presslar family, including three baptized members and two of baptism age, informed the Pastor that this would be their last time at church. To which he responded, ‘Well, I guess I can’t do anything more for you.’** Many came expressly to discuss the current church condition and its doctrinal views.

[Hitchcock is not, by any sense of the word, a “pastor” (the word means “shepherd of the flock”). He is a hireling and a thief in the sheepfold, determined to drive out the faithful sheep and lambs.]

“**Jackie Koshel** tried to express her disappointment and engage the Pastor in conversation concerning the meeting. **He said that he would be happy to set up an appointment to meet with her privately at another time.**

“**Lisa Salamone** also tried to converse with him, but was met with the same “appointment” request.

[Consistently, this tactic was used, to avoid a church showdown over what the pastor was teaching.]

BIBLE STUDY AFTER THE MEETING

“Since the business meeting adjourned early (at 8:30 p.m.), and we had not been permitted to discuss those problems during the business meeting, we asked **Elder Berner** why the elders were unwilling to sit down for Bible study and resolve our problems as a church.

“To his credit, Elder Berner sat for an hour and a half and listened to concerns, and opened his Bible to see and hear, as well as share his views. **Elder Hitchcock repeatedly reminded Elder Berner that he did not have to talk with us. Once the Bible study commenced, Elder Hitchcock requested that I leave and talk with him.** I replied that I was **now** in the middle

Ohio Conference vs. the Law of God

**PART FIVE
OF FIVE**

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

of a Bible study. I could not help being suspicious that the Pastor wanted to meet separately with me, in an effort to draw me away from the Bible study.

“Let it be noted that, to date, this has been the one and only Bible study **ever** held with either an elder or pastor about these issues. As you recall, the invitation to follow the example of our pioneer brethren was offered to bring about resolution within the ranks of the elders of the Willoughby Adventist Church on **Monday May 14.**

[Liberals in the church usually fear Bible and Spirit of Prophecy studies.]

DEBBIE TALKS TO THE PASTOR

“On this same evening (Monday, **June 18**), following the business meeting, **Debbie Pierce** also requested that the censuring issue be discussed at this time, as it is mentioned in the *Church Manual*. **The Pastor responded with this comment: ‘The elders will handle it, but I will meet individually with anyone regarding this issue. Make an appointment with me.’**

“But, because she was insistent, he did decide to talk with Debbie. **She reminded him that it was only at a church business meeting where censuring a person could be decided.** She also expressed her concern that former elders, and sometimes their wives, were attending these elders’ meetings and she did not feel that this should be allowed. Debbie wanted to impress upon the Pastor that Tim was not alone in his views concerning Sabbath-keeping and other doctrinal beliefs that the Pastor has presented. The Pastor said that he wanted to handle the situation with as few people as possible being involved.

“So she asked, ‘Why then were two derogatory letters sent out to the Willoughby Church membership as a whole?’ The Pastor said he loved Tim and it was not censuring. He wanted to avoid it happening. She told him it was ‘censure’ no matter what he wanted to call it, and if the Pastor was going to keep Tim from discussing any issues that were different from the Pastor’s, that Chester, also should refrain from speaking about issues that were contrary, particularly Sabbath observance and other issues. He did not respond to this. *(The above conversation was submitted by Debbie Pierce.)*

“Monday, **June 25:** I received the third letter from the Pastor. It was in response to the meeting, following the business meeting, where he was rebuked by all the church members present for not allowing discussion of this most important issue over the keeping of the Bible Sabbath.

RAPID DEVELOPMENTS

“Sabbath, **June 30:** The Pastor spoke to some of

the elders—but not to Elders Koshel, Smithisler, or Arnett—that a new elders’ meeting would be called, and that **only one hour would be allotted, and then, ‘never again would we discuss these issues.’** This is what Elder Sjoberg told Elder Koshel in a phone conversation.

“Friday, **July 6:** I received a letter from the Pastor telling me of the elders’ meeting scheduled for Monday, July 9. The letter stated that I personally had a list of fifteen grievances with the Pastor. I never told the Pastor any such thing. Why did he write it? I had relayed to Elder Raj Attiken that collectively we, the church members, have about ten to fifteen grievances—not that I, personally, had fifteen. As I stated in this document, I had three clearly stated grievances:

“*The Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal position as it relates to:*

“1. Sabbath observance according to Scripture.

“2. The established doctrinal view, that the Ten Commandments were not nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14-17).

“3. Pastor Hitchcock has departed from doctrinal integrity in regards to Adventist beliefs which are clearly set forth in the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, and historical documents authored by such men as are known to have been faithful ministers of our Lord’s remnant church throughout the past 150 or so years.

“**Sabbath, July 7:** Between the Sabbath School/Worship break, I personally went to tell Pastor Hitchcock, Elder Berner, and Elder Layne that I would not be able to attend the next elders’ meeting. I suggested meeting the following Sunday, and Pastor Hitchcock said it would have to be postponed until next month’s elders’ meeting.

“At this juncture, **Russ Koshel** wanted the church body to know that **he had been contacting Chester, as well as attempting to contact the elders for the past six months in an effort to settle some doctrinal issues, mainly Sabbath observance and the fictitious belief that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross. He had been disappointed with the general reluctance to search the Scriptures on these matters.** Russ expressed concern over the virtual elimination of the Church Board, and how these issues, like Tim’s “sanction,” may have been kept out of general business meeting discussions. **He said he was also interested in finding out whether or not the conference’s ‘ordination of pastors’ would require pastors to support the 27 fundamental beliefs.** Russ Koshel has faithfully served the Willoughby Church in the capacity of Elder, Head Deacon, and Sabbath School Superintendent.

“**Monday, July 9:** I attended the monthly business meeting, **which began early and ended abruptly when**

my wife Valerie and I arrived along with Debbie Pierce. After the meeting, I approached Elder Pat Berner in the parking lot to ask him about the letter concerning the May 11 vote, to ask the conference to assist with my grievance with Elder Hitchcock. He replied, that he had no memory of such a letter. I also asked Elder Hitchcock if I could ask him about the letter, as he approached me with his hand behind his back. (A yellow jacket had stung him.) He was quite irritated, even more than before he was stung. **He said, ‘Tim if you want a copy of the letters, I will gladly mail you a copy!’**

“But he never sent me anything pertaining either to the conference assistance vote of the elders or my censure from preaching, teaching, or conducting prayer meeting as an elder in the local Adventist church of Willoughby, Ohio. I caught Elder Sjoberg as he was about to pull out of the lot, and asked him the same question (regarding letters sent to the conference). I received the same reply, no memory.

“However, as we spoke, Valle Sjoberg told me that he, himself, eats out on the Sabbath with his family. He also mentioned that a well-known evangelist—who was the Ohio Conference evangelist—always took his family out to eat on the Sabbath also! Discovering that, I could better understand the situation at the conference office.

“Wednesday, **July 25:** Church clerk, Valerie Arnett drafted a letter regarding the true account of events surrounding the May 11 elders’ meeting, during which Pastor Hitchcock censured Elder Arnett. It also noted the gossip generated by the elders who were supportive of the Pastor, in the sense that they were themselves either profaning the Sabbath or else supportive of the idea of the Ten Commandments being nailed to the cross. The gossip was about our teenaged children, who were present at every meeting, both seeing and hearing not only Chester’s doctrine, but also his attacks upon my character in front of the church family at the May 11 meeting.

ARNETT’S LETTER

“Monday, **July 31:** Due to the unresolved conflicts in our local church and the apparent underlying contempt for gospel order by the Pastor and half of our present and former elders, I knew that I had to make a step which was formal in nature. Elder Hitchcock was pushing for an end without resolution, to which I could never agree, and for which the Word of God gives no sanction. Therefore, I sent a formal letter to all the elders, including Elders Attiken and Hitchcock, stating that ‘I will not again ask to sit with the eight elders of Willoughby or respond to their request to sit with them, unless and until the conference officers are present to hear my three grievances without prejudice.’ Four witnesses also included their letters of testimony regarding what they had both seen and heard at the May 11 meetings.

“Perhaps some may feel that our doctrinal beliefs

are subject to man-made improvements, such as the Ohio Conference version of grievance procedure. **Their policy created a loophole for Chester Hitchcock to take himself out and away from the arena where his actions had originated.** The Willoughby Adventist Church is where I addressed my concerns to him. And I will admit **he earlier warned me, ‘I will not appear before the local church, I will only appear before the conference committee.’**

“Because he is an ordained minister, does that make him different when it comes to sin and error? The Biblical record indicates that sin is still sin. Whether King David or Achan, Jezebel or Mary Magdalene commit it, all must come to repentance before God.

“As to whether or not that which the Pastor was teaching and living harmonized with Adventist Church doctrine can easily be answered from Scripture and 150 years of books, pamphlets, study materials and the Spirit of Prophecy, which show our clear doctrinal position on all points of our faith.

“What troubles me is that these are established truths, which have been settled as truth long ago. Therefore, it is apparent that an Achan is in the camp. The truth is older than any of us, and it never changes. That is why it is called the Word of God, because the Author declares, ‘I am the Lord, I change not.’ Malachi 3:6

“But again, as Elder Hitchcock stated earlier in his May 11 sermon to the Madison Adventist Church, **‘What I say might seem new to you, but not to the church.’** Question: Wasn’t he just addressing the church? [The people sitting in the pews before him were the ‘church.’] Oh, did he mean the church leadership way up there somewhere in Mt. Vernon [the Ohio Conference headquarters] or at General Conference headquarters? Forgive me, but Elder Hitchcock has been implying that a lot of people are members of his sect of Adventism. If his doctrines are endorsed by the leaders of our state, union, division, and general conferences, then the half of the Willoughby Church which has been praying for (and begging) him to repent of his sins will have to apologize to him for not realizing that he was taught to say these things. And then they will have to leave the ranks of the Adventist Church as a whole, for then she would clearly be in apostasy if her leaders believe and teach such errors.

“Wednesday, **August 8: I received a letter from the Pastor, informing me of an August 14 meeting with Elder Raj Attiken.** Only the local elders, past and present, were to attend.

AUGUST 14 MEETING WITH ATTIKEN

“Tuesday, **August 14: Elder Attiken, president of the Ohio Conference, came to our church and met with the elders. He permitted no Bible discussion.** He said that six pastors validated Chester. However their names, church districts, and the process

by which Elder Hitchcock was validated were not discussed. He also said, **'We will not discuss theology, this is not a theological problem.'** Elder Attiken merely came to give this report, which is all it was. He had not come to hear the concerns I, along with half the church family, had about Chester's 'theology.' **He had come to put an end to the process of Matthew 18:15-18.** Elder Hitchcock then gloated and said he had, in effect, won the standoff. Then he added, 'I want a win-win situation. I want Elder Arnett to go up front with me in front of the church and say, "I don't agree with Pastor Hitchcock, but I am willing to work with him.'

"I then responded, 'Chester, if I did that then I would be participating in your sins. **I've told you before that I am convicted that this is a sin issue.'** To this, Chester turned to Elder Attiken and asked what they could do now as the church elders. Then Elder Bill Hartman blurted out what Chester was really wanting to ask for: 'If Tim doesn't want to work with the Pastor, then **let's disfellowship him!**'

"Then I spoke: **'If you're going to disfellowship me, then you will have to do it in front of the church. You will have to tell the church what my sin is, that I am being disciplined for.'** To this Elder Attiken said something I felt was in no way relative to what we were presently discussing, which was disfellowshipping Tim Arnett.

"Next, **Ohio Conference President Attiken admonished us by saying, 'I must warn you, that Willoughby will be removed from the sisterhood of churches if you make a stand on the Sabbath observance issue.'**

'I thought, wow! Is that a threat? So I asked him. "Elder Attiken, is that a threat?' He never responded. And then the meeting digressed into petty nonsensical commentary. **I was also threatened at this meeting with physical violence by two of the elders.** I will not openly state their names (God knoweth). Suffice it to say, this is the lowest form of debasement any Christian can go, to actually threaten to punch another brother in Christ. Elder Attiken then said we would conclude with prayer, **at which time I stood to leave.**

"Why would I choose to leave at this point you ask [before the prayer was offered by the conference president]? Long ago the Lord convicted me as to the importance of putting all sin under the blood of Christ before coming into His presence, or else all I say is for nothing. **Proverbs 28:9, 13 says, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination . . . He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'** This meeting wasn't what the Lord intended. There wasn't resolution, only a covering of sins. Again I quote the words of wisdom, **'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper:** but

whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.' **Verse 13.**

"How could I participate any further in this meeting when I didn't even get to present my grievances? Why did the conference leadership of our church come in and not address the valid concerns of the membership of our church members? Obviously, it is because they were forcing the new theology, that they believed, down our throats. Someone else got their way, and I'm not talking about anyone who was seen with eyes at this meeting. The spirit of Satan was present and clearly carried the day, because the fruits of the carnal mind which **war against God's law and gospel order** was apparent, in that **no toleration of the facts were allowed to be presented.**

THE CONFERENCE LETTER

"Conference Letter, dated August 15: I wish to reply to the statements made by the conference president, concerning his perception of what occurred on August 14.

[We are not directly told what that letter contained, but the following reply, by Tim, indicates that it apparently included these points: **"The August 14 meeting at the Willoughby Church was successful, in that it brought closure of discussion to issues of concern. Allegations of theological error on the part of Pastor Hitchcock were found to be groundless. His positions were validated."**]

"1. Closure of discussion on these 'issues of concern' does not represent the resolution called for in Matthew 18:15-18. He might feel he has brought closure (a sociological term for concluding something), but how can sin be concluded within the confines of the church. It cannot remain, for Paul told the Corinthian church to 'purge out the old leaven . . . and sin shall not have dominion over you.' 1 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 6:14 (Ezekiel 20:20, 21 and 38).

"2. The phrase, 'allegations of theological error' as used in the letter, wasn't discussed at this meeting. Neither were my three grievances. Had we discussed them, I'm sure they would have been mentioned point by point in the conference president's letter. This letter has given the impression to all the church members that these issues were discussed, when in fact **they were not!**

"3. Validation is meaningless without substance. What was Chester asked? [Apparently, at the meeting Arnett asked him:] 'Elder Hitchcock did you in fact publish materials for Bible study, that the Ten Commandments were nailed firmly to the cross? Is it true that you are teaching your congregation that it is proper to grocery shop or eat in restaurants on the LORD'S HOLY SABBATH DAY?'

"None of the facts were presented to us and therefore cannot constitute a true and honest report of how Elder Hitchcock was validated. There are no documents, reports, nothing at all to verify what Elder Atti-

ken said. This is called a power play, a manipulation on a grand scale of what is the truth and what is true gospel order in the Church of Jesus Christ. Only in the judgment will the truth be known.

August 15. The letter from the conference president, Raj Attiken, was read by Elder Bill Hartman to a group of people who hadn't been inside the church for decades. Why they were there, only those who invited them know. But in the end, the church voted to accept sin and an apostate as their leader instead of Jesus Christ. Elder Bill Hartman [the one who at the meeting said that Arnett should be disfellowshipped] unwittingly indicted the Columbia Union as being part of this apostasy, saying that it was their officers who validated Chester Hitchcock.

[Whether or not the officers of the Columbia Union are involved in the Ohio Conference office apostasy, we do not at this time know.]

SEPARATION OCCURS

“Sadly, the faithful members who had not compromised their faith now saw no other alternative than to separate from the Willoughby congregation. We never intended on dropping our membership, for we were practicing members of the faith, not just attendees.

“At our next scheduled Church Board meeting, the following people resigned from their offices that they held that year (2001).

“Timothy Lee Arnett—from Head Elder, Sabbath School Teacher and Community Services Assistant.

“Valerie Arnett—from Community Services Director and church Clerk.

“Ray Smithisler—Elder.

“Russ Koshel—Sabbath School Superintendent.

“Debbie Pierce—Interest Coordinator.

“Lisa Salamone—Community Services.

“At this Church Board meeting, the pastor asked me, point blank, whether I was also dropping my membership from the Adventist Church, to which I replied, “I will always be a Seventh-day Adventist!” One by one, each of us formally resigned, with not one objection I might add from the others.

“At the conclusion of this meeting, Sister Debbie Pierce was gathering her personal belongings, which were both gifts and evangelistic materials that she worked on at church to give to people during birth-

days and holidays. (She said she wanted to take them home because she did not foresee returning to the Willoughby Church). I had left the building, and the door was locked behind me, but then I noticed the women being harassed by Pastor Hitchcock, the treasurer John Huffman, and Elder Bill Hartman. The door flew opened and out came Lisa Salamone with some of Debbie's things.

“I reentered the building and enquired as to what was going on. Then I was told that the Willoughby Police had been called. I asked why they were called, and then they pulled up. This was so very embarrassing to have to go through this. **The pastor went outside and told the police that we were no longer members of the church, which was a lie.** The community at large was most likely surprised to see patrol cars surrounding our building with lights flashing in the night. **Elder Hitchcock is the one who bears the responsibility for all these horrible occurrences.**

“After that night, we knew that we would never be able to return, and **we were also asked never to return.** Later on, letters were sent out, to try to shame us into returning to their church and their beliefs.

THE FAITHFUL ARE DISFELLOWSHIPPED

“**April 16, 2002,** a letter was sent, saying that they had to keep church records in order (some excuse) and that we needed to decide what we were going to do. And then a few months later, we were formally dropped from the roles of the church without a hearing or anything. Nearly twenty faithful Adventists were dropped, which included children as well, who were away at school and had nothing to do with these events. My wife's grandmother, who had had brain surgery and was in a nursing home, was also cut off. This was very cruel and unjust. **All this, to keep an unqualified minister in the pulpit, who has preached error and profaned the Sabbath of the Lord, our God.**

“I am still waiting for justice from the church leadership of Seventh-day Adventists, but doubt that it will ever occur. It is obvious that apostasy exists within the Seventh-day Adventist organization, and that it is an organized apostasy.

“In His Service,

“Elder Tim Arnett”

This crisis is of such a stupendous nature—involving the possible loss of a large part of the Ohio Conference (which has 88 churches and 11,683 members)—that, when this report is printed, copies will be sent to the several leading officers of the Columbia

Union Conference in Columbia, Maryland, and the General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland. It is very possible that they were not aware of this crisis. But now they will understand the nature of the problem and be able to take action to eliminate it.