



# A Case of Mistaken Identity

“**Y**ou call yourself a Christian, but I’ve seen you going into the bar downtown several times,” accused a co-worker at the local school district. “And here you are, always reading your Bible at work like you are Mr. Holy.” I was the assistant director of the maintenance department for the local school district, so at times I filled in for janitors who were sick and could not make it to work. This particular elderly janitor, a “once-saved, always-saved” Baptist, obviously did not like me.

We had many discussions about the Bible and theology. As she puffed away on her cigarette, she would make comments: “You really think you know your Bible, don’t you? What do you do, read it all day or what?” Needless to say, to find fault with my life seemed to be her greatest joy! And I do have faults—none of us are perfect. However, when she started accusing me of going to the bar repeatedly, I was a bit confused—that is, until I saw “him.”

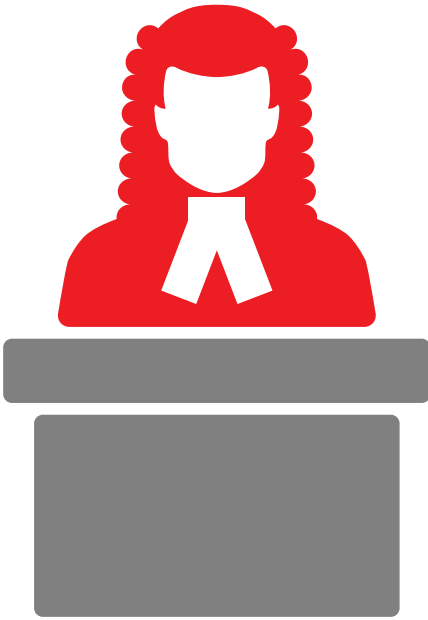
Back then I had a beard, brown plastic frame glasses and often wore plaid shirts and blue jeans.

While driving through town one day, I saw “me” on the sidewalk. He looked just like me at first glance. And yes, he was smoking a cigarette. Before long he ducked right into the local bar! The next evening at work this janitor apologized. “Yes, I took a closer look and realized it wasn’t you.” She said this with a hint of disappointment in her voice.

## **THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY APPEAR**

The Bible clearly tells us, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge,

**BY JEFF REICH**



## Judge not, that ye be not judged.

ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (Matthew 7:1-2). We need to be careful about assuming and passing hasty judgment on others, as things are often not what they seem.

As a teen, my eldest daughter needed a car. We found one she liked, and one I could afford, in a local paper. I called the owner, who lived quite a long way from us, and we decided to meet at a half-way point so we could look at the car. At the appointed time, we met in a parking lot in a nearby city.

After a close inspection, we decided to buy the car. Before making that decision, however, I asked a lot of questions: Why are you selling the car? Has it been wrecked? Does it need any repairs? I always take a personal interest in people as well, asking them what they do for work, if they are from the area, what kind of cars they are into — always trying to find things in common.

The man soon was comfortable talking with me and started to open up about his life. He explained how he and his long-time, live-in girlfriend had just broken up. He was trying to pull together some needed money, as she was also his business partner and now his business was not doing well because she left.

We decided to drive all the way to his house so we could get the title for the car. While there, he began showing me some of his other cars and telling me more and more about his life. "I do not know why I am telling you all this," he said. "I really don't even know you. But I should have known better than to be living with this lady in the first place. I was raised a Seventh-day Adventist. My dad is an elder at one of the local churches. I should have known better."

"You are an Adventist?" I queried. "Yes," he replied, "but I have not attended church for a number of years." I then broke the news to him that I was

an Adventist as well. We talked for a long time, and I encouraged him to get his life right with Christ and to go back to church. Lesson learned? Things are not always as they appear.

We need to be so careful about passing judgment on people. Many things that happen in life are divine appointments. What if I had not taken a personal interest in him? What if I would have sized him up and judged him for his life choices? The book of John in the Bible tells us, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." We never know to whom we are talking.

### THE BOX OF BEER

One day two men who had been "drinking and driving" out in the back woods had their truck break down along an out-of-the-way country road. Jerry, a church member, saw them with their hood up, stopped, and asked if he could help. The men said they needed a phone so they could have someone come pick them up.

Jerry, who was also an elder in the local Adventist church, told them he would be happy to take them to his house, which was down the road about a mile, so they could use his phone. The men grabbed a box out of the front seat of their truck and hopped in. Jerry glanced over and happened to see that the box was full of cans of beer!

On arriving at Jerry's home, the men grabbed their box of beer and followed him inside. They placed the box on the kitchen table, then proceeded to the other room where the telephone was located.

Just then one of the members from the local church showed up and walked up to the back door of the house. Walking by the kitchen window, he happened to glance in and saw the box of beer. He was shocked! He turned around and immediately left.

Later that day, he shared his concerns about what he saw with another church member. Soon everyone in the church knew that Jerry had a serious drinking problem. After all, the information came from a reliable source who witnessed it first-hand!

Eventually the pastor called Jerry on the phone and told him he wanted to have a meeting with him about something serious. When Jerry showed up at the church, there was the pastor and three of the other elders waiting for him. The pastor shared his concerns, reprimanding Jerry. Because Jerry was an elder, he would have to be removed from his offices if he indeed had a serious drinking problem.

Jerry was a bit taken aback and did not have a clue what the pastor was talking about! He simply asked, "Why do you think I have a drinking problem?" The pastor explained to him what was seen and that the information came from a reliable source. As they talked, Jerry started putting the pieces together. He explained what happened during that "eventful" day.

Later that day, the church member who had seen the beer and spread the rumors called Jerry and apologized. But such is the case when people jump to conclusions and imagine the worst scenario in a situation. How many reputations have been ruined by false reports spread through gossip by people jumping to conclusions or assuming something about a person

or situation! How many issues could be easily solved by simply following Bible counsel by going directly to the person in question, and talking with him or her privately! How many embarrassing and hurtful episodes could be avoided by simply using some common sense!!

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

The question may seem easy—what should you do when information comes to you from someone else? Here are some suggestions to avoid the pitfalls:

- 1) Ask the person, "How do you know this is true?"
- 2) Ask the person, "Did you go talk with that person?"
- 3) Tell the person who is gossiping, "You should go talk with that person. If you are not willing to do that, then you should not be telling other people this information."

The Bible instruction is very clear: "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." (Matthew 18:15-17).

### RESTORE SUCH A ONE

One day, Carl, a church elder, was waiting for his wife in the car while she was shopping. Across the street was

a liquor store. To his amazement and dismay, he saw another church elder coming out of the store with a bottle of liquor. He was shocked, disappointed, and speechless.

He decided not to tell anyone, but instead made it a matter of prayer. The next day he went and visited this elder and told him what he had witnessed. Holding back his tears, the elder explained, "I have hardly ever taken a drink my whole life. You know, recently I lost my father, who was really close to me. I admit, I bought that bottle and got drunk. I know it was wrong. I was just discouraged, depressed, and dealing with a lot of grief."

The two men prayed together. The man who had been drinking told Carl how glad he was to finally have someone to talk to about what he was going through. "A great weight is off my chest," he explained, "and I can assure you, this will never happen again." Carl decided not to tell anyone, but instead called and talked with the other elder every week to see how he was doing. And the elder did not buy another bottle after that. Nothing was ever said. The brother who fell was restored.

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:1-2.



**Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**