

EXTRACTS FROM THE TESTIMONIES
ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. On the Evil of Uncleanness

We are nearing the Judgment, and those who bear the message of warning to the world, must have clean hands and pure hearts. They must have a living connection with God. The thoughts must be pure and holy, the soul untainted, the body, soul, and spirit be a pure, clean offering to God, or He will not accept it.--Testimonies to Ministers, p. 426.

The youth, for misdemeanors of a comparatively light character, are treated with much severity; but when men and women of large experience, who have been considered patterns of piety, are revealed in their true character, --unsanctified, unholy, impure in thought, debased in conduct,--then it is time for such to be dealt with in a decided manner. The greater forbearance that is exercised toward them, has only had, as far as my knowledge extends, the influence to cause them to regard their fornication and adultery as a very light matter, and all their pretense has proved to be like morning dew when the sun shines upon it.--Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 426, 427.

Cleanse the camp of this moral corruption, if it takes the highest men in the highest positions. God will not be trifled with. Fornication is in our ranks, I know it, for it has been shown me to be strengthening and extending its pollutions. There is much we will never know; but that which is revealed makes the church responsible and guilty unless they show a determined effort to eradicate the evil. Cleanse the camp, for there is an accursed thing in it.--Testimonies to Ministers pp. 427, 428.

It is a truth which should make every one of us weep, that those living in these last days, upon whom the ends of the world are come, are far more guilty than was Belshazzar. This is possible in many ways. When men have taken upon themselves the vows of consecration, to devote all their powers to the sacred service of God; when they occupy the position of expositors of Bible truth, and have received the solemn charge; when God and angels are summoned as witnesses to the solemn dedication of soul, body, and spirit to God's service,--then shall these men who minister in a most holy office, desecrate their God-given powers to unholy purposes? Shall the sacred vessel, whom God is to use for a high and holy work, be dragged from its lofty, controlling sphere to administer to debasing lust? Is not this idol worship of the most degrading kind?--the lips uttering praises and adoring a sinful human being, pouring forth expressions of ravishing tenderness and adulation which belong alone to God,--the powers given to God in solemn consecration administering to a harlot; for any woman who will allow the addresses of another man than her husband, who will listen to his advances, and whose ears will be pleased with the outpouring of lavish words of affection, of adoration, of endearment, is an adulteress and a harlot.--Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 434, 435.

The law of God proclaimed upon Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and yet you who transgressed that law in so marked a manner were teaching others the Bible. God did not accept your labors. . . . I could not present your sin before you in too strong language. . . .

If your moral sensibilities are quickened, it is through the converting power of God. If you are transformed in character, the Lord knows all about that. And if you have through repentance been uplifted to reach a high stan-

dard and holy, I cannot myself say the Lord will not regard your case. . . . Now, please to take your case to the Lord, and if you are in communion with Him, He will hear your prayers, and will guide you in judgment. My heart pities you. The first time the sin was committed, it was done without so much time for meditation, the second sins were committed after time to meditate, after time to consider the matter in the light of the word of God, in the face of the seventh commandment. . . . I leave the matter where it is. I could say to you to go to trustworthy persons in the Conference (not men but women), and talk with them, but I am inclined to think that should you do this, you would be giving publicity to those things which would cause all to be removed from you, and they would not encourage you or accept you to engage in any branch of the work, when they should understand the matter as it is. I must now leave this matter between you and your God, and please do not trouble me any more with it. I have no disposition to expose you; but leave you to develop character. I pity you and hope that you will move in discretion, and become altogether that which God would have you.--Letter 95, 1893.

2. In Dealing With The Erring

In dealing with erring church-members, God's people are carefully to follow the instruction given by the Saviour in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew.--Gospel Workers, p. 498.

Whatever the character of the offense, this does not change the plan that God has made for the settlement of misunderstandings and personal injuries. Speaking alone and in the spirit of Christ to the one who is in fault, will often remove the difficulty. Go to the erring one, with a heart filled with Christ's love and sympathy, and seek to adjust the matter. Reason with him calmly and quietly. Let no angry words escape your lips. Speak in a way that will appeal to his better judgment. Remember the words, "He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

Take to your brother the remedy that will cure the disease of disaffection. Do your part to help him. For the sake of the peace and unity of the church, feel it a privilege as well as a duty to do this. If he will hear you, you have gained him as a friend. --Gospel Workers, p. 499.

"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." Take with you those who are spiritually minded, and talk with the one in error in regard to the wrong. He may yield to the united appeals of his brethren. As he sees their agreement in the matter, his mind may be enlightened.--Gospel Workers, p. 500.

"But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." If he will not heed the voice of the church, if he refuses all the efforts made to reclaim him, upon the church rests the responsibility of separating him from fellowship. His name should then be stricken from the books.

No church officer should advise, no committee should recommend, nor should any church vote, that the name of a wrong-doer shall be removed from the church books, until the instruction given by Christ has been faithfully followed. When this has been done, the church has cleared herself before God. The evil must then be made to appear as it is, and must be removed, that it may not become more and more widespread. The health and purity of the church

must be preserved, that she may stand before God unsullied, clad in the robes of Christ's righteousness.

If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit, and by confessing and forsaking his sin gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted.--Id. pp. 500, 501.

"Verily I say unto you," Christ continued, "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This statement holds its force in all ages. On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead. It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting its prosperity, purity, and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their unchristlike conduct would bring dishonor on the truth. ~~Whatever~~ the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God's word, will be ratified in heaven.--Id. pp. 501, 502.

"Whosoever sins ye remit," said Christ, "they are remitted; . . . and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Christ here gives no liberty for any man to pass judgment upon others. In the sermon on the mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God. But on the church in its organized capacity He places a responsibility for the individual members. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," the Lord says, "with all long-suffering and doctrine."

Deal faithfully with wrong-doing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbath-breaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God's word is pronounced upon them in heaven. In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who despises the authority of the church, despises the authority of Christ Himself.

But there is a brighter side to the picture. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted." Let this thought be kept uppermost. In labor for the erring, let every eye be directed to Christ. Let the shepherds have a tender care for the flock of the Lord's pasture. Let them speak to the erring of the forgiving mercy of the Saviour. Let them encourage the sinner to repent, and believe in Him who can pardon. Let them declare, on the authority of God's word, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." All who repent have the assurance, "He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt

cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."--Id. pp. 502, 503.

If he will not hear them, then, and not till then, the matter is to be brought before the whole body of believers. Let the members of the church, as the representatives of Christ, unite in prayer and loving entreaty that the offender may be restored. The Holy Spirit will speak through His servants, pleading with the wanderer to return to God. Paul the apostle, speaking by inspiration, says, "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." He who rejects this united overture, has broken the tie that binds him to Christ, and thus has severed himself from the fellowship of the church. Henceforth, said Jesus, "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." But he is not to be regarded as cut off from the mercy of God. Let him not be despised or neglected by his former brethren, but be treated with tenderness and compassion, as one of the lost sheep that Christ is still seeking to bring to His fold.--Desire of Ages, p. 441.

Christ's example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord's supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches. But beyond this none are to pass judgment. God has not left it with men to say who shall present themselves on these occasions. For who can read the heart? Who can distinguish the tares from the wheat? "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."--Id. p. 656.

I was shown that you had been wrong in sympathizing with E. The course you have taken in regard to him has injured your influence, and has greatly injured the cause of God. It is impossible for E to be fellowshipped by the church of God. He has placed himself where he cannot be helped by the church, where he can have no communion with nor voice in the church. He has placed himself there in the face of light and truth. He has stubbornly chosen his own course, and refused to listen to reproof. He has followed the inclinations of his corrupt heart, has violated the holy law of God, and has disgraced the cause of present truth. If he repents ever so heartily, the church must let his case alone. If he goes to Heaven, it must be alone, without the fellowship of the church. A standing rebuke from God and the church must ever rest upon him, that the standard of morality be not lowered to the very dust. The Lord is displeased with your course in these things.--Testimonies, Vol. 1, 215.

The names of those who sin and refuse to repent should not be retained on the church books, lest the saints be held accountable for their evil deeds. Those who pursue a course of transgression should be visited and labored with, and if they then refuse to repent, they should be separated from church fellowship, in accordance with the rules laid down in the word of God.

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee: leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Matt. 5: 23, 24.

(Following Scriptures are also quoted: Matt. 18: 15-17; 1 Cor. 5: 9, 10; Rom. 1: 16-18; 2 John 9-11.)

Those who refuse to hear the admonitions and warnings given by God's faithful messengers are not to be retained in the church. They are to be disfellowshipped; for they will be as Achan in the camp of Israel,--deceived and deceiving.

Who, after reading the record of Achan's sin and punishment can think it according to the will of God that those who do wickedly, refusing to repent, are to be retained in the church? To retain them would be an insult to the God of heaven.--Letter 215, 1902.

I saw that _____ had moved too fast in some cases, that there had not been that patience and forbearance with individuals that there ought to have been. Others of the brethren had moved too fast.

I saw that great caution should be used and the church will have to bear some with individuals who do not always understand the movings of the Spirit of God, and always have some errors. And if these individuals were disfellowshipped they would be brought more closely in connection with an unholy influence and the possibility of saving them be lost. But if they were still retained in the fellowship of the church, they will be where the church can have some influence over them and may by moving judiciously and carefully win them to all the truth which will discover to them their errors, and cause them to yield them up and be fully united to the church.

I saw that the messengers and the church must have compassion with some, making a difference. Now the messengers of God must seek wisdom and know how to treat each individual case. All must not be treated alike. By close examination it will be seen that individual cases differ. Some are to be borne with longer than others, but if one is living in disobedience to the commandments of God, the church must act and must separate them from them. And for other sins it will often be necessary to disfellowship souls if they continue in their sins; yet great care should be used and great patience and forbearance exercised.--MS 1, 1855.

3. On Confession:

a. How and When to be Made:

In many of our religious awakenings, mistakes have been made in regard to confession. While confession is good for the soul, there is need of moving wisely.

I have been shown that many, many confessions should never be spoken in the hearing of mortals; for the result is that which the limited judgment of finite beings does not anticipate. Seeds of evil are scattered in the minds and hearts of those who hear, and when they are under temptation, these seeds will spring up and bear fruit, and the same sad experience will be repeated. For, think the tempted ones, these sins cannot be so very grievous; for did not those who have made confession, Christians of long standing, do these very things? Thus the open confession in the church of these secret sins will prove a savor of death rather than of life.

There should be no reckless, wholesale movements in this matter, for the cause of God may be made disreputable in the eyes of unbelievers. If they hear confessions of base conduct made by those who profess to be followers of Christ, a reproach is brought upon his cause. If Satan could by any means spread the impression that Seventh-day Adventists are the offscouring of all things, he would be glad to do it. God forbid that he should have occasion! God will be better glorified if we confess the secret, inbred corruption of the heart to Jesus alone, than if we open its recesses to finite, erring man, who cannot judge righteously unless his heart is constantly imbued with the Spirit of God. God knows the heart, even every secret of the soul; then do not pour into human ears the story which God alone should hear.

There are confessions of a nature that should be brought before a select few, and acknowledged by the sinner in deepest humility. The matter must not be conducted in such a way that vice shall be construed into virtue, and the sinner made proud of his evil doings. If there are things of a disgraceful nature that should come before the church, let them be brought before a few proper persons selected to hear them, and do not put the cause of Christ to open shame by publishing abroad the hypocrisy that has existed in the church. It would cast reflections upon those who had tried to be Christlike in character. These things should be considered.

Then there are confessions that the Lord has bidden us make to one another. If you have wronged your brother by word or deed, you are first to be reconciled to him before your worship will be acceptable to Heaven. Confess to those whom you have injured, and make restitution, bringing forth fruit meet for repentance. If any one has feelings of bitterness, wrath, or malice toward a brother, let him go to him personally, confess his sin, and seek forgiveness.

From Christ's manner of dealing with the erring we may learn profitable lessons which are equally applicable to this work of confession. He bids us go to the one who has fallen into temptation, and labor with him alone. If it is not possible to help him, because of the darkness of his mind and his separation from God, we are to try again with two or three others. If the wrong is not righted, then, and ohly then, we are to tell it to the church. It is far better if wrongs can be righted, and injuries healed, without bringing the matter before the whole church. The church is not to be made the receptacle for the outpouring of every complaint or confession.--Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 645-646.

I am in great perplexity at times, and have about come to the conclusion when a case of error and grievous sin is presented before me, to say nothing to my ministering brethren if they do not know the matter themselves, but labor earnestly for the erring one, and encourage him to hope in God's mercy, and cling to the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, look to the Lamb of God in repentance and contrition and live in His strength. . . .

I am compelled to deal plainly and rebuke sin, and then I have it in my heart, placed there by the Spirit of Christ, to labor in faith, in tender sympathy and compassion for the erring. I will not let them alone, I will not leave them to become the sport of Satan's temptations. I will not myself act the part of the adversary of souls as is represented by Joshua and the Angel. Souls cost the price of my Redeemer's blood. When men, themselves liable to temptation, erring mortals, shall be free to pronounce upon another's case, who is humbled in the dust, and shall take it on themselves to decide by their own feelings or the feelings of their brethren just how much feeling the erring one should manifest to be pardoned, [they are] taking on themselves that which God has not required of them. When I know that there are those who have fallen into great sin, but we have labored with and for them, and God has afterwards accepted their labors, when these have pleaded for me to let them go and to not burden myself for them, I have said, "I will not give you up; you must gather strength to overcome." These men are now in active service. . . .

My mind is greatly perplexed over these things, because I cannot harmonize them with the course that is being pursued. I am fearful to sanction sin, and I am fearful to let go of the sinner and make no effort to restore him. I think if our hearts were more fully imbued with the spirit of Christ, we should have His melting love, and should work with spiritual power to restore the erring and not leave them under Satan's control.

We need good heart religion that we shall not only reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine, but we shall take the erring in our arms of faith and bear them to the cross of Christ. We must bring them in contact with the sin-pardoning Saviour.

I am more pained than I can express to see so little aptitude and skill to save souls that are ensnared by Satan. I see such a cold Pharisaism, holding off at arm's length the one who has been deluded by the adversary of souls, and then I think what if Jesus treated us in this way. Is this spirit to grow among us? If so, my brethren must excuse me, I cannot labor with them. I will not be a party to this kind of labor.

I call to mind the shepherd hunting the lost sheep and the prodigal son. I want those parables to have their influence upon my heart and my mind. I think of Jesus, what love and tenderness He manifested for erring, fallen man, and then I think of the severe judgment one pronounces upon his brother that has fallen under temptation, and my heart becomes sick. I see the iron in hearts, and think we should pray for hearts of flesh. . . .

I wish that we had much more of the spirit of Christ and great deal less self and less of human opinions. If we err, let it be on the side of mercy rather than on the side of condemnation and harsh dealing.--Letter 16, 1887.

b. Determining Genuine Confession

I recognize, on the other hand, the danger of yielding to the temptation to conceal sin or to compromise with it, and thus act the hypocrite. Be sure that

the confession fully covers the influence of the wrong committed, that no duty to God, to your neighbor, or to the church is left undone, and then you may lay hold upon Christ with confidence, expecting his blessing. But the question of how and to whom sins should be confessed, is one that demands careful, prayerful study. We must consider it from all points, weighing it before God, and seeking divine illumination.--Testimonies, Vol. 5, pp. 646, 647.

Let the repentance of the sinner be accepted by the church with grateful hearts. Let the repenting one be led out from the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith and righteousness. Let his trembling hand be placed in the loving hand of Jesus. Such a remission is ratified in heaven.--Gospel Workers p. 503.

"Wouldst thou an erring soul redeem,
And lead a lost one back to God?
Wouldst thou a guardian angel seem
To one who long in guilt has trod?
Go kindly to him, take his hand,
With gentle words, within thine own,
And by his side a brother stand,
Till thou the demon sin dethrone.

"Scorn not the guilty then, but plead
With him in kindest, gentlest mood,
And back the lost one thou mayst lead
To God, humanity, and good.
Thou art thyself but man, and thou
Art weak, perchance to fall as he;
Then mercy to the fallen show,
That mercy may be shown to thee."

Quoted in Volume 5 of the Testimonies
p. 613.

Note: Manuscript statements herein have not been released for general use or for publication.

--E. G. White Publications.