

Another look at —

Church Relationship

— Principles that can provide solutions

One of the most difficult perceived problems confronting God's faithful children at this time is the relation they should sustain to the church.

Indeed, this is one of the most controversial subjects among historic Advent believers! In order to arrive at a working solution which will meet with God's approval, we need to establish correct premises and then build upon them. In this paper we will try to do that.

First, we should state an overarching principle, which stands above all others: Obedience to God's Inspired Writings should stand highest in the attention of God's people, and in their messages to others, whether in the denomination and out of it. God's Word, God's law, the necessity of obedience to both, and the means by which this can be done—this is the special message entrusted to the remnant. It is the Third Angel's Message (Revelation 14:12).

However, the present discussion is concerned with church relationship, so we will now turn our attention to it.

Fundamental to the entire matter is the identity of the church. *What is the church?*

Unfortunately, the word has a variety of meanings, which is part of the reason why there is so much confusion as to how we should relate to it.

There are world churches, Babylonian churches, false churches, apostate churches, counterfeit churches, worldly churches, captive churches, and compromising churches. There is also a true church.

At this juncture, let us consider more closely the true church:

What is the true church? This is another subject for controversy! Yet the answer is not complicated.

The true church is the church approved by God. This church, God's church, is defined in the Spirit of Prophecy as "the commandment-keeping people of God." (See page 10 of this study for Spirit of Prophecy statements.) That definition should be simple enough. And it is! It is clear and accurate. Indeed, it

is the key to unraveling the whole mystery of "the church."

That definition opens to us two other factors, both of which flow out from it: personal relationship and obedience.

Each person in the true church has a personal, surrendered relationship with Jesus Christ. Each person in the true church submits to the authority of God's Written Word and is obedient to it. Lacking those two, regardless of the profession, one is not in the true church.

We need next to see how that definition fits in with other churches we find in the world around us. However, let us first consider a few related definitions. Keep in mind that it is confusion over the word "church" which underlies much of the controversy. The problem is that humans tend to have chunky languages. The words are like a child's building blocks; many have different definitions etched on each side, with each word representing quite different things. In this study (as the present writer frequently does in his other articles and reports), replacement synonyms which is more narrowed and accurate will be used for the word "church." In the following definitions, the replacement words are indicated by italics. (When discussing "the church" with others, if you will also use them, you will find that your conversations are more intelligible.)

The church - This is a body of adherents; that is, people. People, not organizations or buildings! When speaking about the true church (as in much of this present study), it refers to the commandment-keeping people of God.

The denomination - In this study, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Similar phrases are "the organization" and "the structure."

The "Catholic Church" is a denomination; the people in it are the church. The organization or structure is not the church, even though it is commonly called that. Neither are its buildings. It is important

that we maintain a careful distinction in this matter. Religious organizations are denominations, not churches. In correct, divinely-given terminology, the church is the people, not the organization. The believers may have an organization, but the organization is not the people; it is not the church. Contrary to much popular Adventist opinion, organizations are not saved or redeemed. Belonging to an organization saves no one. No atonement was paid on Calvary or is being applied today in the Sanctuary above for organizations, committee meetings, policy books, office equipment, or plane trips. It is being made, we are told, for those who are pleading with God for forgiveness, protection, and help.

A congregation, local church body, local church - This is a group of believers in a specific locality which meets for weekly worship services, and may be a denominationally delegated or controlled congregation (normally meeting in a denominationally-owned building), or it may be an independent congregation, not under the control of denominational leadership.

A local church board - This is the governing body at the local church, which should be answerable to the whole body. It is not the church.

A church building, or worship center - The place of worship in which the congregation gathers for worship. A building is not the church.

The leaders - Those in the denomination exercising authority. They hand down decisions as coming from "the church." Although frequently giving the impression *they* are the church, this assumption is erroneous.

Each of the above is frequently called "the church." However, referring to them by their correct names immediately clears up much of the confusion.

People say, "The church voted this last night." They should say the church board or the constituency voted it.

It is said "You must remain loyal to the church." By this is meant that you should remain loyal to the organization and its leaders. (Few ever speak about remaining loyal to our historic beliefs or the Bible-Spirit of Prophecy writings.)

It is easy to say "Let's go to church." Other possibilities would be "Let's worship with the believers," or "Let's go to the fellowship meeting." Meetings, buildings, and worship centers are not churches. Only the people are.

People say, "The church has said this." They really mean a committee, small or large, said it.

Individuals may say, "I was baptized into the church," meaning into the denomination. (What they should say is that they have been baptized into Christ, who is the head of the church—His people—who are the body.)

Other questions still remain, so let us turn our

attention to them:

But did not Ellen White say that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the true church, or some such words?

The commandment-keeping people of God are the true Seventh-day Adventists. They alone constitute God's true church.

But there are tares in the church; what about them?

The principle of the wheat and the tares is an important one. Throughout human history there have been both wheat and tares in the "church." Yet, according to the definition found in the Spirit of Prophecy, only the truly obedient constitute the true church. This would appear to be a puzzle. —How can the church only have the faithful in it, yet contain tares?

There is a solution. Although the wheat is the true church, Satan has sown tares in among it. In every gathering there may be tares, but they are not part of the true church. They may be present and they may even be on the books, but they are not part of the true church.

But why then does it say "Both wheat and tares are in the church"?

It is the simplest way to say it. The tares cannot be part of God's approved, accepted, true church. There can be no question about that. Yet it is too complicated to say "both wheat and tares are in the church, but the tares are not really accepted by God as part of His true church, even though they may be on the denominational roles."

If you buy a bushel of seed wheat, in order to plant a field, some other seeds will accidentally be included. But it is still a bushel of seed wheat; the tares in the sack do not count.

Simplified expressions are often used by humans, and they are found in God's Word. For example, both the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy very frequently say that "*only the obedient are accepted by God,*" and "*only the obedient will be saved.*" Although correct, we recognize both are incomplete statements. They are incomplete, in that they do not explain the entire process. In human language, we just do not say everything in each sentence. The mind of the hearer and reader could not bear it.

(To clarify, here is more on this: Only the obedient are to be accepted by God, but only God can make them obedient. They cannot even want God until He prompts them by His Spirit to come to Him; then prompts them by His Spirit to obey His Word—and even empowers them by the enabling grace of Christ to render that obedience. In accordance with our willingness, God not only moves us to seek forgiveness, but gives the strength and desire to obey. At each step in the redemption process, from beginning to end, God must initiate and empower. Apart from His

help, we can neither come to Him nor obey Him. Obedience to God's law by enabling faith in His Son Jesus Christ is the Third Angel's Message. Thank God for this glorious truth! So there is more to the matter than simply saying, "Only the obedient will be saved." This incomplete thought, while true, could be interpreted as meaning that one could be saved by obedience, apart from any connection with or help from God.)

In the same way, "both wheat and tares are in the church." A more complete statement would be this: "The wheat is the church and the tares tag along." They want to be in the true church, yet are never willing to submit to the conditions for truly being part of it. So they are never really in the true church. The requirements are submission to Christ and obedience to the Word of God by faith in His Son,—and that is something they do not care to do. As a result, the tares cause innumerable problems, as did the mixed multitude to the Israelites.

But do we not have to belong to the church in order to be saved?

We have to belong to Christ in order to be saved. The true church belongs to Christ. The true church are the faithful. The faithful are not saved by belonging to the faithful. They are saved by belonging to Christ.

But do we not have to be on the church books to be saved?

That is papal. Nowhere in Scripture (Bible or Spirit of Prophecy) do we find such a concept.

But is not the Seventh-day Adventist Church the true church?

As we already noted, the true church is composed of the commandment-keeping people of God. That is the pure wheat which, if they continue faithful, God will ere long take to heaven. But Satan has planted tares in among the wheat. Unless the tares are converted, they will be lost.

But is not the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its organization, the true church?

If so, its policy books, committee decisions, current publications, and all the rest are "true church" status. It is only people which are in the true church. The church policies have not been annointed with holy water; only God's Word is reliable.

So then, the Seventh-day Adventist Church IS the true church? Your description, just above, fits it! There are true believers in it and there are false believers in it.

Think of two concentric circles; a smaller one inside a larger one. In one are all the commandment-keeping people of God. In the second, smaller circle are those commandment-keepers holding membership in the Adventist denomination. Just because some in the smaller circle are in the true church,

does not mean that those in the larger circle are not. The larger circle includes some in the smaller circle, plus more elsewhere.

In another sense, several circles intersect but are not concentric. One circle is the true church. The others are denominational circles. Those in the other churches who are faithful commandment-keepers, are also in the true church circle.

So the true church includes faithful commandment-keepers in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, plus more faithful outside of it?

Correct. The true church is the larger of the two. (Indeed, it also includes all the faithful in unnumbered worlds above; but they are not in the process of being redeemed, so we will not discuss them here.)

Well, then, should I remain in the Adventist denomination? Should I leave; why should I leave, and, if not, why should I not leave?

Aside from intermediate views, there are two primary positions on this matter:

(1) *I am convinced that I should remain in the denomination.*

(2) *I am convinced that I must leave the denomination.*

Before considering each possibility, let us first review several basic principles:

1 - The true church is the commandment-keeping people of God. Implicit in this truth is personal relationship and obedience:

2 - Each person in the true church has a personal, surrendered, direct relationship with Jesus Christ. It is an individual relationship. It is a direct relationship.

3 - Each person in the true church submits to the authority of God's Written Word and is obedient to it.

Authority is always a major issue in any discussion of denominational relationship! God and His Written Word must always be the prior, ultimate authority. Since the early 1930s, the fellowship test handed to whistleblowers has been "Will you submit to duly authorized church authority?" As anticipated, the faithful generally flunk that requirement, and therefore are disfellowshipped—because the requirement is unscriptural. The primary authority is God's Word, and mindless, absolute submission to church say-so would place another authority higher than Scripture.

4 - Christ is the head of the body of the church, and the faithful are members of that body. Heaven would prefer that the leaders lead and the people follow. Order and organization are good in their place, and we know there will be perfect order and organization in heaven. But a problem occurs when leadership permits or mandates error and worldliness, and reproves the faithful when they object. Then the

higher authority, Christ and His Word, must be appealed to, defended, and obeyed.

5 - The primary authority in all meetings and deliberations of the commandment-keeping people of God is the written, inspired Word, which, for those who know about it, includes not only the Bible but the Spirit of Prophecy. To ignore the Spirit of Prophecy, while piously declaring that “the Bible only” is to guide our various decisions—is really to reject both.

It is an interesting fact that those among us who reject the Spirit of Prophecy, generally use the Bible for little more than a take-off for their own theories and fancies. The precision accuracy of the Spirit of Prophecy is a standing rebuke to their errors.

Our fundamental beliefs are to be taught to non-believers out of the Bible. But, among believers, both are crucial to our faith and practice. Why? Because both are fully inspired, and the Spirit of Prophecy provides one hundred times as much detailed, Divine guidance.

6 - The purpose of church association is protection, instruction, and evangelism. Gathered together, God’s people find fellowship, encouragement, and help in ministering to others. If a denomination no longer protects its members from error (or, instead, teaches that error!), then a fundamental reason for corporate fellowship is greatly weakened.

Along with this, we should note this fact:

To most people, “*the church*” is their local congregation. It is the only human “church” on earth that they know. Apart from their family, it is where they find a great deal of their human fellowship. Yet local congregations vary greatly on a broad spectrum between Godly to worldly. In one locality the faithful are happily fellowshiping with likeminded Christians, while in other areas they are being ejected for their beliefs. The condition of their local congregation is highly significant to many, as they try to determine their future status with the entire denomination.

Other principles involve these: Where is your ministry needed? Where are you able to help? Where is your encouragement and counsel not wanted?

And there is yet another factor, not the least in importance: Where are your children the safest? Where are *they* spiritually helped?

Yet another question is what about their future? What course should you take which will be for their best good in the years ahead?

Separation from the denomination now may be the best for your children spiritually. But in future years, what will they do when they grow up? Will they cling to your faith, because you have carried them with you in thoroughly loving your faith, or will they go out entirely, with part of the reason being that they were not in the habit of attending meetings?

In light of all that we have discussed, let us now consider each of two very common viewpoints:

1 - *I am convinced that I should remain in the denomination.* or

2 - *I am convinced that I must leave the denomination.*

If either is your conviction, then be certain at each step that you are obeying God’s Word first and foremost, and not subtly compromising it in order to be accepted by others, or to conform to human standards, either of the church or of independents, or your own stubborn will.

Be submitted to God, and determined to please and obey *Him!* Maintain continual study of His Word, and seek in every way to fulfill His plan for your life.

Consider the entire matter carefully:

Be concerned for the spiritual welfare of your children, spouse, parents, and loved ones. What can you best do to help them? You have a powerful influence on others. What should you do for their and your own best spiritual interests?

Some people just go to church as the door turns on its hinges. Is that what you are doing, or are you trying to earnestly help others at church?

Do they want your help, or do they now consistently refuse it?

Are your family members best helped by your being there, or by your not being there? If your children are in youth classes, mother and father, you do well to be there also. Not necessarily every week, but at least rotating here and there as you see best. If the mother has only one child, she does well to help out in that class very frequently or, better yet, all the time.

But maybe you would do better to teach your children at home. In that case, as noted earlier, where will they go when they grow up? These are all weighty issues to keep in mind.

One thing is certain: Educate your family as to the issues! Teach the true doctrines and the true standards. Warn them against the false ones. Win them and carry them with you in your instruction; do not just command. If all you do is forbid and command, they may throw out everything later on. Teach them to be self-reliant and think for themselves, but always, only in relation to God’s Word. Win them to want your God, and to share in your obedience to His blessed Writings.

Some find a half-way point which, for some is quite successful. They stay at home once a month, or every other week, and have a feast on God’s Word. The other Sabbaths they attend the meetings where they receive little food (and perhaps are restricted

Continued on the next tract

More WAYMARKS - from —
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Continued from the preceding tract in this series

from doing much to help in the main service or the divisions) and occupy themselves with doing what they can to help and bless others.

You might say that I have not told you what to do. It is not my place to tell you that. Only God can give you that counsel. The situation you are in—your home and your local congregation—will be different than most others. Your personal home experience will be a factor also. You may be entirely alone, and craving some kind of weekly fellowship, even if not much is offered. You may have children with needs which only you alone, in prayer, can decide how best should be met. As you plead with God for help, and earnestly give heed to His holy Word, you will know what to do!

No man can make the decision for you, just as no man can tell you where you are to pay your tithes and offerings. These are matters between you and God. Others can point out principles and issues, but you must decide for yourself.

Yet is not the Seventh-day Adventist Church the only gateway to heaven? We must do whatever it takes to remain in it. Otherwise we will be lost!

If you take that position, you may be lost in it. *Obedience to the Word of God comes first*, not enrollment on church books anywhere.

The big problem with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is that far too many members let the leaders carry them gradually into worldliness, while they meekly refuse to speak up and protest. It is the obedient meek which shall inherit the earth; not the craven meek.

Wherever you may find yourself in life, at home, at work, in your local congregation—stand for the right and let the chips fall where they may! Refuse to be putty. God needs your help. Come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, or you will receive the curse of Meroz.

Well, I see it differently. I believe everyone must get out of the Adventist denomination. It is in total apostasy. From top to bottom it is corrupt.

How should we relate ourselves to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination? There is no doubt that

some must leave, or are forced to leave, not through wrongdoing on their part. My brethren and sisters, we live in a very difficult time. Faithful souls are forced to leave, through no fault of their own. Here are several points to consider:

1 - *Is the Seventh-day Adventist denomination totally corrupt?*

A denomination is the people. At the present time, not all those in the denomination are corrupt. But the situation keeps worsening.

First, not all the members are in total apostasy. Many still love the Lord. We find some in most every local church body. Unfortunately, we also find many worldlings there also.

Second, not all the leaders are in apostasy. I know of some who are not. You may also. They are there, but I carefully avoid naming them lest they get in trouble. They are working quietly where they are, as best as they can, trying to hold back the tide of worldliness which is steadily rising. There are faithful pastors and faithful administrators.

Third, not all the doctrines and standards are corrupt. Oh, yes, gradually they are being twisted and perverted, yet many are still in place. You will call to mind a number of them which have not been radically transformed.

Fortunately, it is the Spirit of Prophecy and Bible which keeps correcting the faithful in the right course, in spite of the worldliness that the liberals urge. God's Word is the salt which preserves so much truth in the denomination. Satan knows that separating the people from the Spirit of Prophecy will bring darkness faster than anything else. But there are young people keep growing up who decide to put Scripture first in their lives. Older people are converted and determine to stand true.

2 - *Who is to decide when a person should leave the denomination?*

That is a matter which each must pray and study through with God. Information can be presented, but each must decide for himself. Some have to leave. Some are still able to attend locally and fellowship with other true believers. Each sincerely does the best he knows.

(1) It is a very significant fact that the denomination is not static! It keeps changing, it keeps moving

downward.

(2) I believe we can all agree that we want to be part of the true church, which is composed of God's commandment-keeping people. As part of that church, our first concern must be to study God's Word, and live in conformity with it, wherever we may find ourselves. That must be an initial requirement in associating yourself with any group.

(3) We must also seek for ways to reach others about us and influence them to want to unite in the body of Christ. You should be able to win souls wherever you may find yourself. Fortunately, this is one of the few things men cannot stop you from doing.

(4) Yet those who may need your help might still include some in the local congregation. If you separate from it, are there those you could have helped by remaining?

(5) Perhaps the situation in your local congregation has developed to the point where no one seems to be helped any more by your presence, and you need to leave in order to save your loved ones. In Matthew 10, Jesus said, If no one wants you there, then leave.

These are obviously difficult times. Only prayer and trust in God can carry you through it in the best way.

We fully agree that a massive apostasy is gradually rolling into the denomination. But at what point can we say that *every person in that denomination has passed the point of no return*, that all have committed the unpardonable sin?

Notice that, throughout this discussion, the mat-

ter of people is paramount, not church declamations.

On one hand, church leaders may decree and print a variety of improper statements about doctrine and standards, but what about the people? Can they still be helped?

Do I stop attending a congregation because of the decrees of denominational leaders, or because I can no longer help the members I am able to contact? This too is a decision each must work through on his own.

But is it not the decrees of leadership which determine when the people in a church are too far in apostasy and efforts should no longer be made to reach them?

In the time of Paul the leaders of the denomination had officially, and totally rejected Christ. They had done this in their private meetings and public statements. They openly disfellowshipped any who accepted Christ as the Messiah. In fact, they even went so far as to demand His death, and coerce government authorities to carry it out!

Yet, for a number of years, Paul kept going to Jewish synagogues. He did this to reach the people, explain to them the facts in the case, and urge them to accept the true interpretation of Scripture. He was not trying to save the denomination, but individuals in it. And he did this after 34 A.D., when a very important prophecy about the Jewish nation had terminated.

Then there was Ellen Harmon and her parents. They kept attending their local Methodist congrega-

AN OFFICIAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH

In 1984, I noticed that an 800 number was occasionally mentioned in denominational publications, where non-believers could call in for Bible studies. That sounded good, so I tried to locate it. It was obvious that there were many denominational 800 numbers at the time—many conference book centers had them. Finally, locating the number (it was not printed very often), I dialed it. A young man answered the phone.

Questioning him, I learned he was a Seminary student attending Andrews University. I told him this was the only 800 number that unbelievers could contact to get Bible studies from the denomination. He agreed. I then asked if there were any other 800 numbers at Andrews, and he said there were two: one for student recruiting, and one for their University Book Store. When I mentioned that I would like to share the missionary 800 number with others, so they could learn how to become members of the church, he sounded worried and told me I needed to phone a different number and

speak with his supervisor.

Dialing it, the lady was quite upset that just any Adventist would refer people to that number! Why did I want to tell people they could call a free phone number, in order to learn how to become Seventh-day Adventists? She said the matter would have to be presented to a committee at the General Conference, and a reply would be sent to me.

A couple weeks later I received a letter on official General Conference letterhead. It stated that the number could not be used by members, but only "by the church."

There it was: a clear-cut definition of what the leaders considered to be "the church." In their view it was the leaders. Laymen are "members" of the church, but not "the church." They are like warts on a toad. they are not the toad, but appendages which happen to be stuck to it.

In this view, "the organization," defined as those in authority, are the church. If you grasp this concept, you can better understand the thinking of many leading men.

tion and witnessing until told to leave.

Charles Fitch did not write and publish the first Adventist sermon on the second angel's message, until the denominations were casting out Advent believers in large numbers.

At the direction of God, Jeremiah remained with a totally apostate denomination in his day.

But keep in mind that none of the above had underage children.

Unfortunately, we have a very fluid situation in the denomination at this time. The apostasy today will be different tomorrow. It keeps getting worse!

But can we do missionary work on our own, without church approval?

To stop doing missionary work because a representative of the denomination disapproves, would be as wrong as to no longer keep the Sabbath because they disapproved. Even religious leaders are fallible men. God's Word has primacy.

John the Baptist obviously carried on missionary work independent of approval by any of the religious authorities. There is no evidence that he ever received their approval. The same with Jesus. All the prophets in the Old Testament encountered the same difficulty with the religious establishment, with but a very few exceptions. (The prophets at the time of Zerubbabel, for example, would be an exception.)

It is obvious that Paul worked at times without General Conference approval. Other examples could be cited.

Well, what about the future of the church?

In the midst of a world in sin, the church militant fights the ongoing battle of yielding implicit obedience, by enabling faith in Christ, to the law of God. Soon it will become the church triumphant. How thankful we can be for this. We are on the winning side!

But what about the Seventh-day Adventist denomination? Where does it fit into this picture of futurity?

The matter is covered in some detail in the present writer's *End Time Series*, which provides an in-depth presentation of Spirit of Prophecy statements on final events from just before the National Sunday Law enactment, on down to the final end of sin and sinners, and eternity beyond.

But here are a few pointers to consider:

1 - It is far more important that you be certain that you are counted among the commandment-keeping people of God, than that your name be on or off the books of the Seventh-day Adventist—or any other—denomination or group. Future events make that certain.

2 - When the National Sunday Law occurs, it will be illegal to be a Sabbathkeeper. This will not be a

minor persecution, but a total attack by the devil through his agents. At that time, one of three things will happen—and either of them fulfills the prediction in *Testimonies to Ministers*, 300:

a - The Seventh-day Adventist organization will be totally eliminated. The organizational structure will be annihilated, and probably most or all of its real estate will be confiscated. There will be no more organizational structure, but only individuals or little groups, under the direct leading of God.

b - The organization will have to go totally underground, with results essentially the same as the above paragraph. For practical purposes, there will be no organized Adventist denomination.

c - A majority of the key organizational leaders will apostatize—and carry the denominational structure into Sunday worship. This is not inconceivable, for it has happened at times in other nations. The situation in Hungary has been a close parallel.

Either way, there will be no more leaders to think for you. There will only be little individuals and little groups, going out giving Bible studies, giving natural remedy treatments, and distributing literature.

3 - From the best we can tell in the Spirit of Prophecy writings, there will be no denominational administrative offices or hospitals after the Sunday Law is passed. But the writings indicate that smaller print shops may continue.

Check it out for yourself, and see what you find.

But isn't the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination special?

It surely is! In the eyes of God, it numerically stands in the vanguard of those organizations which, before time ends, should be preaching the importance of obeying the law of God.

But, unfortunately, a growing number of influential leaders and teachers in its administrative offices, hospitals, publishing houses, academies, colleges, universities, and local congregations are new theology in viewpoint.

They do not believe it is necessary to obey God's commandments, and they are teaching their antinomian theories to all with whom they come in contact. These men and women declare that it is impossible to put away sin and obey God's law in this life. They say it would have been impossible even for Christ, while on earth, to obey it if He had taken the nature of Adam's descendants.

For example, Morris Venden has provided a good explanation of why he and his fellow liberals find it necessary to maintain that Christ took the nature of Adam before his fall. They do not want to consider the possibility that God requires obedience of anyone that will be saved. So they theorize why it is not necessary or possible for us to obey the Ten Commandments.

In the following statement, Venden says he accepts the error that Christ did not take our nature—because otherwise he, Venden, would have to accept the fact that we could be enabled to perfectly obey God’s law. (Regarding the nature of Christ, all agree that He never once sinned.)

“There doesn’t seem to be any question that the definition of sin, and the nature of Christ, and perfectionism are a package. I think that the contention is quite valid that if a person defines sin primarily in terms of transgression of the law—in legalistic terms and understandings—that he is going to need to have a Saviour who has struggled with all of his same temptations to transgress the law. In the process one ends up with perfectionism and a behaviorally oriented Christianity.

“Now, if you go back to define sin in terms of relationship—sin in terms of living a life apart from God—you don’t need to have a Savior exactly as you are. In fact, His very difference indicates that He could have lived independently, but He chose to depend on God. I feel that His dependence upon the Father is the essence of Christ’s example to us. After all, He did say, ‘Without Me you can do nothing.’ Allowing a difference between our nature and Christ’s nature prevents us from getting bogged down in perfectionism, because that’s not where the issue lies, anyway. Perfection of character must be seen in terms of relationship, not in terms of spelling out ethical and moral options.”—*Morris Venden, “Morris Venden Talks to Insight, Part 1,” Insight magazine, May 8, 1979, pp. 7-11.*

You will find the above quotation, and many more, in the present writer’s study, *Morris Venden and the New Obedience—Part 1-9 [FF-401-409]*, now in Part 3 of our *Publishing Tractbook*. That study is a compilation of well over a hundred statements from Venden’s books and articles denying a variety of our historic beliefs and standards.

Please note that the above quotation is instruction written to our young people, and published by our largest publishing house. Venden rejects the first “package,” which is obedience to God through the enabling grace of Jesus. He heartily recommends a second package, which he elsewhere explains includes the teaching that sin is not the transgression of God’s law, but only a damaged relationship (restoring the relationship removes the sin). With this definition of sin, he explains, we do not need a Saviour who was like us. We do not need His example of obedience, but only His example of dependence, for it is the relationship that is important, not the obedience. Because Christ did not have our nature, we need not concern ourselves with living clean lives. Indeed, Venden teaches that character perfection occurs spontaneously, with no resistance of sin on our part, when our relation with God is restored. Concern with ethical and moral principles, or trying

to teach them to our children, only hurts us and them, and shuts us away from God. (Read the tractbook for more.)

That is an example of the pit toward which many of our influential pastors and teachers are leading us! It is a serious matter, but few seem to be concerned.

Yes, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is important to God! But far too many are exchanging the truths of God’s Word for cheap trinkets which modernists in our church claim to be far better.

There is still one other question. How do we reconcile statements that this people will go through to the end, with other statements that they might be set aside?

A quotation on one side is found in *Christ’s Object Lessons*. A series of eight chapters in that book (212-319) deals with judgment hour issues. In “*The Lord’s Vineyard*,” an application is directly made to God’s denominated people in the last days. The final section of that chapter (296-307) carries the subtitle, “*The Church of Today*,” and is obviously referring to us. Comparing us with the Jewish church in the time of Christ, it climaxes with this statement:

“The Lord says, ‘Shall I not visit for these things?’

Jer. 5:9. Because they failed of fulfilling God’s purpose, the children of Israel were set aside, and God’s call was extended to other peoples. If these too prove unfaithful, will they not in like manner be rejected?”—*Christ’s Object Lessons, 304.*

Sample statements on the other side are to be found, for example, in the statement, “The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains.”—*Maranatha, 32.*

Compare the first two chapters of *Testimonies to Ministers* (15-23).

What are the answers to this apparent conflict?

Consider these facts:

The denominated church in every age could be set aside because of increasing apostasy—and almost always was! The only exceptions occurred when repeated persecution caused the group to return in repentance to God. Israel during the time of the Judges would be an example. If you read the history of the Waldensians, you will note that, for centuries until modern times, every 50 to 80 years the Waldensians were persecuted.

In view of this sorry history, we should fully expect that the Advent people will go into total apostasy, like the religious groups which preceded them. Under normal conditions it would be a certainty.

Yet we have the predictions that this will not oc-

Continued on the next tract

More WAYMARKS - from —
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Another look at —

Church Relationship

— Principles that can provide solutions

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

cur. But a careful examination of the passages reveal that the predictions of ultimate victory concern the Advent people, not a denominational structure or organization.

And there is more.

Looking more closely at the *Testimonies to Ministers* statements (15-23), we find that they consistently define this group which will not fall as those who are keeping, defending, and proclaiming the law of God.

In addition, we have that oft-quoted statement,

“The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains.”—*Reflecting Christ*, 226.

How do we reconcile the fact that all earlier religious groups eventually went out (including the Waldensians since 1850), and our people will not?

The answer is not complicated.

The Advent people today live at a unique time in history. Only the church in the time of Noah paralleled it in sheer extremity.

In the year of the Flood, everyone had turned against Noah and his call to repent and obey God. By that time, most of the faithful had been laid to rest.

It could truly be said of the church in Noah’s time, “It appeared as about to fall, but did not fall.” Noah and His family boarded the ark and passed on into a new world, while the wicked perished.

So it will be in the end time.

The present writer has told people for years that the “does not fall” passage would have to refer to the National Sunday Law crisis.

Then, while preparing his 18-book *End Time Series*, a compilation of classified, in-depth Spirit of Prophecy statements on final events, he searched for the context of that quotation, and eventually found it (see section reprint at the back of this present three-part tract set).

The “does not fall” passage is in the heart of a discussion on the National Sunday Law crisis!

So we can see why the Seventh-day Adventist people in our time are different than all other religious groups which have preceded them (with the exception of Noah).

All those before us eventually went into apostasy and were supplanted by new groups which God raised up. But, according to the prediction, our people will have a different end:

Yes, as did their counterparts in earlier centuries, they will continue a predicted, downward trend into total apostasy. “They may appear as about to fall.” *About to fall!* The degree of apostasy is drastic, and their total separation from God (the final spiritual collapse) is imminent.

But then, as suddenly as Noah’s lightning and rainstorm from heaven, the National Sunday Law is enacted—and the entire situation changes!

This is what will make the group longevity of Seventh-day Adventists longer than that of the Baptists, Methodists, and Lutherans before them. A crisis of stupendous proportions will burst upon the world and, very likely within a few weeks, every false and apostate Sabbathkeeper in America will fully join the enemy forces. Not long after that, the Sabbathkeepers throughout the world will be purified.

Actually, the Sabbathkeepers will split into two groups. One will consist of the tares who have been living and teaching apostasy. Most of the lukewarm who liked their skeptical ideas will go out with them.

“The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains.”—*7 Bible Commentary*, 911.

The tares (a majority of those in the denomination) fully fall, but “the church” does not, showing that the tares were never actually part of “the church.”

The faithful Advent people do not fall, but, in the strength of God, resist the Sunday Laws enacted throughout the world.

Thank God! There is victory at the end!

Can you now see why we have that accurate prediction—that God’s faithful ones in these last days will not fall?

But it is obvious that this victory does not apply to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination as a whole, nor to its organizational structure or real estate. The victory will only be for *the commandment-keeping people of God* in the last days; whoever they may be. We pray that it might include all Adventist church members, but that will have to be an indi-

IDENTIFYING THE TRUE CHURCH

Down through the ages, God's true church has consisted of those who obey His law. Seventh-day Adventists today must obey it in order to be accepted by Him. There are no exceptions. The church He accepts is the depository of His law (4T 286; 5T 455).

"To the same work [of proclaiming the Ten Commandments] He has called His people in this generation. To them He has revealed His will, and of them He requires obedience. In the last days of this earth's history the voice that spoke from Sinai is still saying to men: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.' . . . Even the churches are taking sides with the great apostate in claiming that the law of God has been changed or abrogated [no longer need be obeyed]."—6 *Testimonies*, 10.

"Our work as believers in the truth is to present before the world the immutability of the law of God. Ministers and teachers, physicians and nurses, are bound by covenant with God to present the importance of obeying His law. We are to be distinguished as a people who keep the commandments. The Lord has stated explicitly that He has a work to be done for the world."—6 *Testimonies*, 199-200.

"God has a church upon the earth who are His chosen people, who keep His commandments."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 61.

"God has a church on earth who are lifting up the down-trodden law, and presenting to the world the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. The church is the depository of the wealth of the riches of the grace of Christ, and through the church eventually will be made manifest the final and full display of the love of God to the world that is to be lightened with its glory."—*Review*, September 5, 1893.

"The whole world is filled with hatred of those who proclaim the binding claims of the law of God, and the church who are loyal to Jehovah must engage in no ordinary conflict."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 50.

"The church [are] His chosen people, who are keeping His commandments."—*Review*, November 8, 1956.

"God is leading out a people. He has a chosen people, a church on the earth, whom He has made the depositories of His law. He has committed to them sacred trust and eternal truth to be given to the world."—2 *Selected Messages*, 66.

"The Lord hath not spoken by any messenger who calls the church that keeps the command-

ments of God, Babylon."—2 *Selected Messages*, 68.

"The church is God's fortress, His city of refuge, which He holds in a revolted world . . . From the beginning, faithful souls have constituted the church on earth."—*Acts of the Apostles*, 11.

"The church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 15.

"The Lord has a people, a chosen people, His church, to be His own, His own fortress, which He holds in a sin-stricken, revolted world; and He intended that no authority should be known in it, no laws be acknowledged by it, but His own."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 16.

"The members of Satan's church have been constantly working to cast off the divine law, and confuse the distinction between good and evil."—*Ibid.*

"The church is the property of God, and God constantly remembers her as she stands in the world . . . He forgets not His representative people who are striving to uphold His down-trodden law. He knows that the world that hated Him, hates them."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 19.

"Like David, we may now pray, 'It is time for Thee, Lord to work, for they have made void Thy law.' Men have gone on in disobedience to God's law until they have reached a point of insolence that is unparalleled . . . Will God's commandment-keeping people be carried away with the prevailing iniquity? Will they be tempted, because universal scorn is placed upon the law of God, to think less of that law which is the foundation of His government both in heaven and in earth? No. To His church His law becomes more precious, holy, honorable, as men cast upon it scorn and contempt. Like David, they can say, 'They have made void Thy law. Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.'"—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 21.

"During ages of spiritual darkness, the church of God has been as a city set on a hill. From age to age, through successive generations, the pure doctrines of heaven have been unfolding within its borders."—*Acts of the Apostles*, 12.

"The church on earth, composed of those who are faithful and loyal to God, is the 'true tabernacle,' whereof the Redeemer is the minister."—7 *Bible Commentary*, 931.

vidual choice.

It is of interest that, in the National Sunday Law crisis, a remarkable event will have occurred: God's people will have no tares troubling them from the inside. They will only have enemies from without. There will no longer be multiple circles intersecting into the one true church. Instead, there will only be the one true church. All other religious groups will be on the devil's side.

Oh, my friend, we must stand true; we must stand true! Help is coming! After the storm there will be a warm spring and summer in heaven with Jesus for a thousand years! We dare not miss it.

This study has provided you with three basic principles, none of which need be considered new:

1 - Obedience to God's Word is the crucial issue today, and more important than church relationship.

2 - The true church defends, obeys, and promotes the law of God.

3 - The Seventh-day Adventist people are part of the true church, only to the degree that they keep God's commandments.

In view of what is ahead, which church should you be in?

Make certain you are in God's commandment-keeping church! If you have to stop keeping God's commandments in order to continue in fellowship with any congregation, then you had better warn others and leave with your loved ones.

These are serious times in which we live. Let us not rest satisfied with surface thinking. Dig deeply into God's Word, and be certain you are in the center of His will—every day. — Vance Ferrell

To the best of our knowledge, our 18-book *End Time Series* is the most complete, classified collection of Spirit of Prophecy statements on final events, beginning with just before the National Sunday Law and going on down to beyond the final destruction of the wicked.

Here is a portion of the fourth book, *The Shaking and Sifting*. As with all the books in this series, this one includes crucial topics, such as the final separation of the wheat from the tares in the church, the forsaking by the majority, the departure of many leaders, the many who will enter.

- 5 -

THE CHURCH WILL APPEAR AS ABOUT TO FALL BUT WILL NOT FALL

1 - Satan will try to destroy the little company.

“Those who keep the commandments of God

and the faith of Jesus will feel the ire of the dragon and his hosts. Satan numbers the world as his subjects. He has gained control of the apostate churches; but here is a little company that are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. As he influenced the heathen nations to destroy Israel, so in the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God . . . Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer.

“The trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. The revelator, looking down the ages to the close of time, has declared, ‘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.’ Revelation 12:17. Some who today are living on the earth will see these words fulfilled.

“The wrath of Satan increases as his time grows short, and his work of deceit and destruction will reach its culmination in the time trouble.”—*Faith I Live By*, 289:1-3.

2 - God will be with His faithful ones to the end.

“I am encouraged and blessed as I realize that the God of Israel is still guiding His people, and that He will continue to be with them, even to the end.”—*General Conference Bulletin, May 27, 1913*, 165.

3 - God will care for His faithful ones.

“The church, soon to enter upon her most severe conflict, will be the object most dear to God upon earth. The confederacy of evil will be stirred with power from beneath, and Satan will cast all the reproach possible upon the chosen ones whom he cannot deceive and delude with his satanic inventions and falsehoods. But exalted ‘to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins,’ will Christ, our representative and head, close His heart, or withdraw His hand, or falsify His promise? No; never, never.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 20:0.

4 - His people will not fall, but will go through to the end.

“The church . . . does not fall. It remains.”—*7 Bible Commentary*, 911/2:2.

Note: The above passage, taken from Letter 55, 1886, has been quoted repeatedly. Here is the complete list:

Maranatha, 203:2

Maranatha, 32:5
 Manuscript Releases, Volume 12, 324:3
 Reflecting Christ, 226:6
 2 Selected Messages, 380:2
 7 Bible Commentary, 911/2:2
 Upward Look, 356:5

In the process of looking them all up, one was found which had the complete letter! It is 2 *Selected Messages*, 376:1-383:1. That is indeed fortunate, for, only recently, we had found most of the letter only in the unpublished manuscripts, which we are in the process of printing under the title, *The Last Days*.

The portion found in *The Last Days* is quoted below.

Two facts will help us understand the above “church does not fall” passage:

(1) Consistently, the Spirit of Prophecy applies statements about “the church” to the faithful, commandment-keeping people of God. In other words, the “church” is composed of His faithful, obedient children, plus tares. Unless they repent, the apostates will fall! But those who remain dedicated will not. But, by their continued loyalty to God and obedience by faith in Christ to His commandments, the faithful will not. Yet so many superficial believers will go out from among us in that hour of great crisis, that it may, for a time, appear as if the entire church body is disappearing! When the governmental iron fist of Sunday law enforcement comes, Sabbathkeepers will make rapid decisions, which will determine their eternal destiny.

(2) The context of the paragraph, quoted just above (“The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains.”), reveals that the “about to fall” event culminates in the National Sunday Law crisis. It will be the National Sunday Law enactment which will very early overthrow the church, and that, although the disobedient will depart from the faith, God’s own, who love and obey His Word, will not fall but go through to the end. Fortunately, we now have the context of the above “will not fall” passage! Part of Letter 55, 1886, is included in an unreleased set of manuscript statements, which we printed in our lengthy study, *The Last Days*; and all of it is in 2 *Selected Messages*, 376:1-383:1.

In all the published reprints (with the exception of the 2SM passage), the full context of Letter 55, 1886, had never been presented. That fuller context is a typical discussion of the Sunday law crisis, and mentions the National Sunday Law, Satan’s miracles, and governmental demands. It speaks about the apparent fall of the church and how only the sinners are sifted out while those who remain

(those not sifted out; i.e., the remnant) will be the ones who maintain their obedience to God’s laws. So it will be the National Sunday Law crisis which will cause the false professors in our church to depart. And that which remains will be the true professors; the passage says nothing about what will happen to the organization (General Conference corporation, etc.).

Here is the fuller context of the “will not fall” passage, as given in a hithertofore unpublished document in our publication, *The Last Days*:

“We are to be ready and waiting for the orders of God. Nations will be stirred to their very center. Support will be withdrawn from those who proclaim God’s only standard of righteousness, the only sure test of character. And all who will not bow to the decrees of national councils, and obey the national laws to exalt the sabbath instituted by the man of sin to the disregard of God’s holy day, will feel, not the oppressive power of popery alone, but of the Protestant world, the image of the beast.

“Satan will work his miracles to deceive. He will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out, the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths . . .

“The remnant that purify their souls by obeying the truth gather strength from the trying process, exhibiting the beauty of holiness amid the surrounding apostasy . . . “That which God required of Adam before the fall was perfect obedience to His law. God requires now what He required of Adam—perfect obedience, righteousness without a flaw, without shortcomings in His sight . . . We cannot do this without that faith that brings Christ’s righteousness into daily practice . . .

“The great issue so near at hand will weed out those whom God has not appointed and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry, prepared for the latter rain . . . ‘A new life is proceeding from satanic agencies to work with a power we have not hitherto realized. And shall not a new power from above take possession of God’s people?’ ”—*Letter 55, 1886, 4-7 (to G.I. Butler and S.N. Haskell, December 8, 1886)*. [This letter is quoted in more complete form in 2 *Selected Messages*, 376:1-383:1.]

The great final test is soon to come upon all of us. How important it is that we cling to God and His sacred Scriptures. Instruct, warn, plead with others. There is little time left. — *vf*