

VIOLATION OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT AND CHURCH RELATIONSHIP

It is frequently asked whether the believers should accept ministers, who have violated the seventh commandment, back into the ministry.

The following clarification, not only about ministers but believers as well, should provide some help in determining this:

“There is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband or wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God. Although the laws of the land may grant a divorce, yet they are husband and wife still in the Bible light, according to the law of God.”—*Manuscript Release 448, 19 (AH 344)*.

“I saw that the seventh commandment has been violated by some who are now held in fellowship by the church. This has brought God’s frown upon them. This sin is awful in these last days, but the church has brought God’s frown and curse upon them by regarding the sin so lightly. I saw it was an enormous sin and there have not been as vigilant efforts made as there should have been to satisfy the displeasure of God and remove His frown by taking a strict, thorough course with the offender.

“It has had an awful, corrupting influence upon the young. They see how lightly the sin of breaking the seventh commandment is regarded, and the one who commits this horrid sin thinks that all he has to do is to confess that he was wrong and is sorry, and he is then to have all the privileges of the house of God and be held in [the] embrace or fellowship of the church.

“They have thought it was not so great a sin, but have lightly esteemed the breaking of the seventh commandment. This has been sufficient to remove the ark of God from the camp, if there were no other sins to cause the ark to be taken away and weaken Israel.

“Those who break the seventh commandment should be suspended from the church, and not have its fellowship nor the privileges of the house of God. Said the angel, this is not a

sin of ignorance. It is a knowing sin and will receive the awful visitation of God, whether he who commits it be old or young.

“Never was this sin regarded by God as being so exceedingly sinful as at the present time. Why? Because God is purifying unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It is at the very time when God is purifying this peculiar people unto Himself that [un-sanctified] individuals step in among us. Notwithstanding the straight truths they have heard—the terrors of the Word of God set before them, and all the blazing truth for these last days calculated to arouse Israel—they sin with a high hand, give way to all the loose passions of the carnal heart, gratify their animal propensities, disgrace the cause of God, and then confess they have sinned and are sorry!

“And the church receives them and says ‘Amen’ to their prayers and exhortations, which are a stink in the nostrils of God, and cause His wrath to come upon the camp. He will not dwell in their assemblies. Those who move on thus heedlessly, plastering over these sins, will be left to their own ways, to be filled with their own doings.

“Those who anciently committed these sins were taken without the camp and stoned to death. Temporal and eternal death was their doom; and because the penalty of stoning to death is abolished, this sin is indulged in beyond measure and is thought to be a small offense.”—*Manuscript 3, 1854*.

“It is impossible for E to be fellowshiped 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.”—*1 Testimonies, 215*.

“Of how much confidence is a man worthy who will thus leave his wife and children and seek to contract a second marriage? . . . By seeking to contract another while your wife was still living, you dishonored God and showed that you either had not a sound religious faith, or were not of a sound mind.”—*10 Manuscript Releases, 193*.

“I have no real ground of hope for those who have stood as shepherds to the flock, and have for years been borne with by the merciful God, following them with reproof, with warnings, with entreaties, but who have hid their evil ways, and continued in them, thus defying the laws of the God of heaven by practicing fornication. We may leave them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, after all has been done to reform them; but in no case entrust to them the guardianship of souls. False shepherds! Oh, can it be that the men who have been engaged in this work for a long time will corrupt their ways before the Lord after great experience and special light?”—*Testimonies to Ministers, 428*.

“It may not be too late for those who have sinned to be zealous and repent [and be finally saved]; ‘for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.’ This [worldly] sorrow is a deceptive kind. It has no real virtue in it. There is no sense of the aggravated character of sin; but there is a sorrow and regret that the sin has come to the knowledge of others; and so no confessions are made, except in acknowledgment of the things thus revealed which cannot be denied . . . This is the sorrow of the world, which worketh death, and pacifies the conscience, while the sin is still cherished, and would be carried on just the same if there were an opportunity, and they could not be discovered . . . Here we can see the duty that rests upon the church to deal with those whose course of action is entirely contrary to the light which they have received. Will the people of God take their stand upon the Bible, or will they

be worse than infidels, and give arguments to this class to reproach Christ and the truth, because they do not obey the claims of the gospel in faith and obedience by a circumspect life and a holy character?"—*Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers, Series A, No. 9, 61-62. (1897).*

"God calls His people to elevate the standard. The church must show their zeal for God in dealing with those who have, while professing great faith, been putting Christ to open shame. They have imperiled the truth. They have been unfaithful sentinels. They have brought reproach and dishonor upon the cause of God. The time has come for earnest and powerful efforts to rid the church of the slime and filth which is tarnishing her purity. The church of Christ is called to be a holy, powerful people, a name and praise in all the earth . . . If the fruit does not appear, then God is not glorified."—*Ibid.*

"In His providence He brings these persons into positions which will in time reveal the defects in their character, that if they wish to see and correct them they can do so."—*3 Testimonies, 513.*

"Some, however, do and are restored to [membership in] the church, but not till they have merited the confidence of the people of God by unqualified confessions and a period of sincere repentance [showing that the sin has been fully put away]."—*Adventist Home, 346.*

"In view of the dangers of this time, shall not we, as God's commandment-keeping people, put away from among us all sin, all iniquity, all perverseness?"—*5 Testimonies, 601-602.*

"If it [the improper sexual advance] is from one in high places, who is dealing in sacred things, the sin is of tenfold greater magnitude."—*Adventist Home, 336.*

"If a minister of the gospel does not control his baser passions, if he fails to follow the example of the apostle and so dishonors his profession and faith as to even name the indulgence of sin, our sisters who profess godliness should not for an instant flatter themselves that sin or crime loses its sinfulness in the least because their minister dares to engage in it. The fact that men who are in responsible places show themselves to be familiar with sin should not lessen the guilt and enormity of the sin in the minds of any. Sin should appear just as sinful, just as

abhorrent, as it had been heretofore regarded; and the minds of the pure and elevated should abhor and shun the one who indulges in sin as they would flee from a serpent whose sting was deadly."—*2 Testimonies, 457:1.*

You may also wish to read *3T 238:1; 1T 441:1; 3T 513.*

Here are several basic principles you will find in the Spirit of Prophecy. (All except most of the Adventist Home statements are quoted in this present study. The AH statements will be found in AH 326-352.)

1 - In some cases separation is acceptable (*AH 343:2-344:0; 344:4-345:0*), but generally is not best (*AH 342:3-343:1; 344:4-345:0; 345:1-6*).

2 - There are no Biblical reasons for divorce except adultery of the spouse (*AH 340:3; 341:3; 342:2; 344:3; 345:1*).

3 - A totally abandoned spouse should accept it (*AH 344:10*), but should not remarry unless the spouse commits adultery.

4 - Legally divorced people are still Biblically married (*AH 344:2*), unless the spouse commits adultery (*AH 344:3*).

5 - A minister who does these things is not worthy of remaining in the ministry (*AH 327:1*). Flee from those who would entice you to sin (*AH 327-339*). Members should shun adulterous ministers (*AH 336:1*).

6 - The one committing adultery is to be put out of the church (*Special Testimonies, Series A, No. 9, 61-62 [quoted earlier in this study]*).

7 - In the case of an adulterous minister or church worker, he is to be discharged from his position (*TM 426-428; 434:1-435:0*).

8 - If the offending one (s) remains in a state of adultery (because of remarriage or otherwise), he is not to be taken back into church membership, nor into the ministry or any other area of God's work (*AH 328-331; 1T 215; TM 428:2; 426:2-3*).

9 - In the case of very serious misdeeds, the erring one is never to be brought back into church membership (*1T 215*).

10 - If the offending one (s) confesses and forsakes the adultery, after a probationary period, he may be taken back into church membership (*AH 346:1*), but never again into the ministry or other church office where he

stands before the people in a capacity as a spiritual leader (*426:2-3; TM 428:2*).

11 - If his repentance is real and, through the grace of Christ, the former adulterer persists in right living, he may yet be saved, but, if he continues in adulterous relationships, he will be lost and not go to heaven (*1T 215*).

12 - Upon discovering that the spouse has committed adultery, the innocent spouse is free to divorce and remarry (*AH 346:2*).

13 - But, after discovering it, the innocent spouse is not condemned for choosing to remain with the one who has committed adultery. Yet after learning and choosing to remain, the innocent spouse may not then leave (*AH 346:3-4*).

A warning to us today: read *Adventist Home, pages 326-327*.

It is clear, from the Inspired Writings, that the people of God must, through the grace of Christ, have purity of heart and life.

Their ministers must be pure also, or the curse of God rests upon the congregation. Please turn the page.

OUR HISTORIC STANDARDS ON ADULTERY, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

[WM-589-591]—A brief, three-part collection of quotations from the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, and other sources. The important changes in the Church Manual are carefully explained.

VIOLATION OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT AND CHURCH RELATIONSHIP

[WM-602]—How should we relate ourselves to adulterous church members and pastors? There are answers here.

KEEPING ADULTEROUS PASTORS

[WM-587-588]—A two-part report on a proposed change in the North American Division Working Policy, to be presented for approval to the 1995 General Conference Session. It would officially permit adulterous ministers to be placed back in the ministry after a two-year waiting period.

PERMITTING ADULTERY IN THE MINISTRY

[WM-601]—How should we relate ourselves to adulterous church members and pastors? There are answers here.

THE TORRES CASE [WM-583-586]

A four-part report on the problem of rehiring ministers who have divorced their wives and remarried. Discussion of the case of a very prominent local NAD pastor.

The warning has been given —

We are NOT to be shepherded by adulterous ministers!

“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, or He will not accept it.

“Recent painful developments of evil are one of the greatest evidences we have that the end is near. Satan, like a roaring lion, is going about, seeking whom he may devour; and if men and women, under the blazing light that now shines in this perilous time, will be found fornicators, I am afraid that God will separate them from the work forever.

“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.

“No sooner are they placed in temptation than they reveal their moral defects—that they are not partakers of the divine nature, neither have they escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; but that they are earthly, sensual, and devilish. Satan finds in them something that he can work up into marked iniquity, and he improves his opportunity, and the result is, those who claim to be shepherds of the flock are carnally minded, leading the sheep in their care, whose purity, modesty, and virtue they should strictly guard, into licentiousness and lewdness. Angels of heaven are looking on with shame and grief and disgust.

“How can the pure angels of heaven minister unto this class? How can they bring heavenly light into the assemblies where such ministers are advocating the law of God, but breaking that law whenever a favorable opportunity presents itself; living a lie,

pursuing an underhanded course, working in secret, nursing their polluted thoughts and inflaming their passions, and then taking advantage of women or men who are tempted, like themselves, to break down all barriers and debase their bodies and pollute their souls? How can they do this thing? How can they have any fear of God before them? How can they have any love for God in their souls? Of what value is their faith in the truth?

“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.

“The words of God to Joshua are: ‘Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.’ These things are written for our benefit, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 426:2-428:1.

“A preacher may be dealing in sacred, holy things, and yet not be holy in heart. He may give himself to Satan to work wickedness and to corrupt the souls and bodies of his flock. Yet if the minds of women and youth professing to love and fear God were fortified with His Spirit, if they had trained their minds to purity of thought and educated themselves to avoid all appearance of evil, they would be safe from any improper advances and be secure from the corruption prevailing around them.”—*2 Testimonies*, 456:4-457:0.

“What can I say to arouse our people? I tell you not a few ministers who stand before the people to explain the Scriptures are defiled. Their hearts are corrupt, their hands unclean. Yet

many are crying, “Peace, peace”; and the workers of iniquity are not alarmed. The Lord’s hand is not shortened that He cannot save, nor His ear heavy that He cannot hear; but it is our sins that have separated us from God. The church is corrupt because of her members who defile their bodies and pollute their souls . . .

“The prevailing spirit of our time is that of infidelity and apostasy—a spirit of pretended illumination because of a knowledge of the truth, but in reality of the blindest presumption. There is a spirit of opposition to the plain Word of God and to the testimony of His Spirit. There is a spirit of idolatrous exaltation of mere human reason above the revealed wisdom of God.

“There are men among us in responsible positions who hold that the opinions of a few conceited philosophers, so called, are more to be trusted than the truth of the Bible, or the testimonies of the Holy Spirit. Such a faith as that of Paul, Peter, or John is considered old-fashioned and insufferable at the present day. It is pronounced absurd, mystical, and unworthy of an intelligent mind.

“God has shown me that these men are Hazael’s to prove a scourge our people.”—*5 Testimonies*, 78:4-79:3.

“The example of those who minister in holy things should be such as to impress the people with reverence for God and with fear to offend Him. When men, standing “in Christ’s stead” (2 Corinthians 5:20) to speak to the people God’s message of mercy and reconciliation, use their sacred calling as a cloak for selfish or sensual gratification, they make themselves the most effective agents of Satan. Like Hophni and Phinehas, they cause men to ‘abhor the offering of the Lord.’ They may pursue their evil course in secret for a time; but when at last their true character is exposed, the faith of the people receives a shock that often results in destroying their confidence in religion. There is left upon the mind a distrust of all who profess to teach the Word of God. The message of the true servant of God loses its power upon the souls of men.

“In Eli’s reproof to his sons are words of solemn and fearful import—

words that all who minister in sacred things would do well to ponder: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" Had their crimes injured only their fellow men, the judge might have made reconciliation by appointing a penalty and requiring restitution; and thus the offenders might have been pardoned. Or had they not been guilty of a presumptuous sin, a sin offering might have been presented for them. But their sins were so interwoven with their ministration as priests of the Most High, in offering sacrifice for sin, the work of God was so profaned and dishonored before the people, that no expiation could be accepted for them. Their own father, though himself high priest, dared not make intercession in their behalf; he could not shield them from the wrath of God. Of all sinners, those are most guilty who cast contempt upon the means that Heaven has provided for man's redemption—who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 580:1-2.

"The Lord would have His people divested of everything unscriptural in regard to the ministry. The men called to the ministry should not be made idols of; they should not be looked upon with superstitious reverence; and because of the power vested in them through their office, sin in them should not lose its offensiveness. Their very office makes sin in them more exceedingly sinful; for in committing sin they make themselves the ministers of sin, the agents of Satan, through whom he can work with success to perpetuate sin.

"All should bear in mind that Satan's special efforts are directed against the ministry. He knows that it is but a human instrumentality, possessing no grace or holiness of its own. He knows that it is an agent that God has ordained to be a powerful means for the salvation of souls, and is efficacious only as God, the eternal Spirit, makes it so. He knows that the treasure of the gospel is in earthen vessels, that it is God's power alone that can make them vessels of honor. They may cultivate the vineyard, a Paul may plant and an Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 404:1-2.

"From the picture that has been presented before me of the corruption

of men and women professing godliness, I have feared that I should altogether lose confidence in humanity. I have seen that a fearful stupor is upon nearly all. It is almost impossible to arouse the very ones who should be awakened, so as to have any just sense of the power which Satan holds over minds. They are not aware of the corruption teeming all around them. Satan has blinded their minds and lulled them to carnal security. The failures in our efforts to bring others up to understand the great dangers that beset souls have sometimes led me to fear that my ideas of the depravity of the human heart were exaggerated. But when facts are brought to us showing the sad deformity of one who has dared to minister in sacred things while corrupt at heart, one whose sin-stained hands have profaned the vessels of the Lord, I am sure that I have not drawn the picture any too strong.

"I have been bearing a very strong testimony, both in writing and in speaking, hoping to awaken God's people to understand that they have fallen upon perilous times."—*2 Testimonies*, 478:1-2.

"Let the attractions of pleasure or selfish gratification be presented, and conscience will be sacrificed to gain the coveted indulgence. Can such a person be trusted? Never! In the absence of temptation he may carry himself with such seeming propriety that your doubts and suspicions appear unjust; but let opportunity be presented, and he will betray your confidence. He is unsound at heart. Just at the time when firmness and principle are most required, you will find him giving way; and if he does not become an Arnold or a Judas, it is because he lacks a fitting opportunity."—*5 Testimonies* 43:3-44:0.

"Belshazzar, while engaged in his sacrilegious feast, was not aware that he had guests he had not invited. The God of heaven heard the praises bestowed upon vessels of gold and silver. He saw the desecration of that which had been dedicated to Him by holy consecration applied to profane and licentious purposes. 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 adulterous and a harlot."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 434:1-435:0.

Two quotations to remember:

"Corrupt men think it easier to misinterpret the Scriptures to sustain them in their iniquity than to yield up their corruption and sin and be pure in heart and life."—*Adventist Home*, 329:3.

"Men who are doing God's work, and who have Christ abiding in their hearts, will not lower the standard of morality, but will ever seek to elevate it."—*Adventist Home* 335:2.

The above two statements (both dealing with the context of this entire report) clearly identify the godly ones and the corrupt ones in our church. It is only the corrupt who, in heart, try to lower the standards of God's people.

What sin can be greater than that?

May God help His children to flee from evil, and study and obey His Word in these final days on earth.

—Vance Ferrell