

After striving so hard that our families shall have it – shall we remove it from others?

The Right to Worship

What are the salvation doctrines? They are the beliefs which could cause you to lose out on heaven if you incorrectly understood and practiced them.

One would be obedience to the law of God by enabling faith in Jesus Christ.

Another would be acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master.

Would the Church be a salvation doctrine? In one sense, it would not. We are told that many will be saved who are in the fallen churches. They studied God's Word, accepted Christ as their Saviour, and lived up to all the light they had.

But, in another sense, the Church could be a salvation issue. What if people were required, for one reason or another, to attend a congregation where error was wont to be taught and practiced. Yet, although they were attending, they were convicted they should not do so. —Why should they not do so? Because they had become aware that they and their loved ones were being spiritually hurt themselves, more than they were spiritually helping others at that local church.

In such a situation, they would be compromising themselves and endangering their children's future. It might, as a result, be possible for them, and/or their children, to be lost. They recognized the danger, yet they continued attending. In addition, they had the advanced light which many Seventh-day Adventists have.

As you know, the present writer speaks out when others will not. He has nothing to lose, and there are no strings attached. In this study, an important principle will be clarified, one you need to be aware of. It could mean

a better decision on your part, at some future time, and the saving of a loved one.

DEFINITIONS OF CHURCH

Before going any further, let us more accurately define a certain word: "church."

"Church" is a word that is inaccurately perceived, simply because it can mean too many different things. Here are twelve of those meanings:

1 - The *local congregation*. (This might be a denominational church or an independent church; but, in this paper, we will limit it to a *denominational church*; i.e., a church under the rule and authority of the conference, union, and General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.)

2 - A *church at home* (a single family worshiping at home).

3 - A *home church* (several families worshiping independently together in a home or other location. An *independent church* could be the same, or it might mean independent worship by an group in an actual church building).

4 - The *local church building*.

5 - The *conference office*.

6 - All *higher-level church headquarters*.

7 - The *General Conference officers*.

8 - *Church leaders*. The present writer has seen letters on official stationery, as well as articles in official publications, which clearly indicate that our leaders really believe they are the church [the reason why they alone are to make all the decisions], and the church members are only members of the church [which are to abide by those decisions]).

9 - The entire *structure*, including all its members, workers, buildings, and equipment. This is the organization. It can also be called the *denomination*. In this study, "denomination" will stand for the main Seventh-day Adventist Church.

10 - Various other churches—Protestant, Catholic, etc.

11 - The *true church* on earth, which is composed of the commandment-keeping people of God.

12 - The *church in heaven*, composed of the angels and beings on other worlds.

In the Spirit of Prophecy writings, the word, "church," (by itself) often means #11. At times, she also used the word for #1 and #9, and, of course, #10.

There are two major issues which are contested in regard to church relationship: (1) Should you belong to the Adventist denomination or should you leave it? (2) The other is less noticeable, but equally important: Does someone else have the right to command where you will worship?

We will briefly consider the principles determining what each of us should do regarding the first question. Then we will turn our attention to the second.

SHOULD YOU REMAIN IN THE DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH?

Should you continue to attend the mainline church body or should you pull away? There is an immense debate over this issue. One reason is because it is such an emotional issue. Another is that there are both reasons for remaining and reasons for leaving. A third factor is that situations vary in different places.

The faithful seem to be pulled in two directions. What should you do?

As we examine the basic principles involved, and weigh their application in each local situation, we find that, indeed, solutions do vary.

First, there may be good reasons why you should continue attending a denominational congregation near you:

(1) Every local congregation is unique. Some are Celebrationists, others are quite liberal, others are veering away from our historic beliefs and practices, while others are still all right. No one can say that they all are bad, for that is not true. Local churches vary. (Frankly, they even do among some of the independent local churches.)

(2) You may be able to attend a local denominational congregation that is fairly good, and you may be convicted that you should attend.

(3) Your local denominational congregation may be veering off, yet you are convinced that you may be able to help others by remaining and urging right beliefs and standards. This especially applies if you have no underage children still at home.

(4) There are definite instances in which a new pastor has brought division, compromise, and modernism into a local church. But, later, he was replaced by a godly, historic pastor who raised the standards and brought the flock back to God's Word. At such times, historic believers have returned.

Second, you may find it best, part or all of the time, to worship separate from a denominational congregation.

(1) Your open stand for what is right may have resulted in your being disfellowshipped or so crowded into a corner that you cannot do otherwise.

(2) Your children may be seriously at risk, if you remain in that congregation. Depending on conditions in the local church, this can be a serious aspect of the problem.

(3) Your personal study of God's Word may have convinced you that, in view of conditions which you find utterly abhorrent, you must separate. Although a sorrowful decision, you may

be convinced that this is necessary.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS

Each local congregation is different, so are historic believers. Some of the faithful do best remaining inside and resisting the apostasy, while others find it best to leave.

What is the effect on the children? This is a very important aspect of the problem.

On one hand, it is urgent that we instruct our little ones in sound doctrine and standards, and warn them to avoid the errors of modernism. We must not be quiet about the matter, lest they will grow up ignorant of the issues. If that happens, we are bound to be sorry later.

We are told that apostasy helps the faithful study and strengthens their faith.

But, on the other hand, too much exposure to it is not good, either for our little ones—or ourselves. Could you maintain your Christian experience if you attended a Celebration church week after week? I doubt it. Soon you would be a dissipated Christian, just like all the rest.

In addition, it is not well to constantly be so embroiled in turmoil that our little ones come to dislike religious topics.

But, whatever you do, carry your children with you! Keep them at your side. Do not fight the battle against error, while they merely stand on the sidelines and wonder what is going on. The best way to approach this is to maintain daily (morning and evening) worship periods in your own home! Sing, pray, and study God's Word. Teach the truth, practice the truth, and warn against error. Worship sessions do not have to be long, but they should be worthwhile. And they should reach the heart.

SHOULD NOT EVERYONE STAY OR LEAVE?

Now we are approaching the heart of our discussion in this paper. No one has been given the authority to require that all must remain in the denomination—or leave it.

We have discussed many reasons

why each local situation varies. People must be left free to move as, through His Word, God guides them.

Church attendance is remarkably like tithe paying, so let us compare the two: No one is to insist that your tithe is to be paid to a certain place. The *Watson Letter* and other Inspired statements make that clear. (If you do not have a copy, write for our two-part Spirit of Prophecy tract study: "*The Tithe.*")

Likewise, no one is authorized by Heaven to require that you worship at a certain place.

Unfortunately, there is a move on foot in the denomination to demand that both tithe and worship are denominational property.

Regarding worship, it is strongly urged that members are to be disciplined, if they attend any independent meeting. Yet they can go to a movie house and even mention it next Sabbath during the worship service—and no one will reprove them.

Regarding tithe, conferences are becoming stricter on enforcing payment of all tithe to the local congregation—or members will be stripped of offices and perhaps membership.

On the tithe, God's Word is clear that tithe may be paid outside the "regular channels" "to do a work which is not being done," which should be done. Read the *Watson Letter*. The points are clearly made, and those who choose to exercise this freedom are commended by the prophet. No one is to tell you where you are to pay your tithe.

On freedom of worship, the Word of God maintains that all are to be free to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. Read *Great Controversy*, 289-296; the principle is clearly stated. No one is to tell you where you are to worship.

THE RIGHT TO WORSHIP

You have an inviolate right to worship God in accordance with the open Scriptures and the dictates of your own conscience. No one else is to attempt to override this, and force you to worship where you believe you should not be or in a manner you conscientiously reject.

It is dangerous for a person to go counter to his enlightened conscience. Luther said, “*Here I stand; I can do no other.*” Live like Luther.

BEWARE OF THOSE WHO WOULD COERCE THAT RIGHT

As you know, there is a controversy going on in our denomination—and in the independent ministries—over whether or not anyone should belong to the denomination, or even attend its churches.

First, I want to tell you that the question of whether or not you should attend a denominational church—is your business. It is your decision, no one else’s.

Second, I want to tell you that, as an adult, you should be wary of anyone or any group who demands that you—or anyone else—conform to their wishes on the matter.

Christians do not force others to worship their way! It is a *non sequitur* [illogical inference] to think they should! They are to counsel, plead, and pray, but they are not to step beyond that and demand.

It is not necessary that you obtain permission from the conference, your local pastor, or your employer to attend a worship service somewhere. That is a decision between you and God.

By now you have read that *Great Controversy* passage. Must we build another *Mayflower* and sail away in search of freedom of worship?

We fully agree that the matter of church attendance is a serious one, but the decision has to be yours. Others can only give counsel, as I have done in this paper.

VIOLATING THE RIGHT TO WORSHIP

Not only in the denomination, but in the Independent Ministries, the idea is strengthening that worship must only be done in certain places. This may seem incredible, but it is none-the-less true.

In one well-known Independent Ministry, anyone who interviews for employment will be told that they cannot attend any denominational church

service—or they will be fired.

We are well-acquainted with a very mature family, whose children are also mature and in their late teens. This family, who are solid in their beliefs, choose to continue attending local denominational churches in order to help the members resist the inroads of apostasy. Who is to say they are not to do that? Yet their employing organization, whose papers you regularly receive in the mail, made such a demand. They left that Independent ministry.

We have recently learned that another, equally well-known Independent Ministry has for the past two years required its workers to attend denominational churches—or worship at home alone.

One family, working there, managed to find one denominational church quite some distance away. They would drive there each Sabbath for church service—and arrived home exhausted. Yet, even in that local congregation, apostasy was gradually taking over. But they did not want to stay home alone.

Finally, in desperation for Christian fellowship on Sabbath mornings, they got together with a couple other worker families and started a home church.

But when the leaders of their employing organization learned of this, the families were called in and summarily told they must either attend a denominational church—or stay home and worship alone. “No home churches!” they were told.

At a subsequent board meeting, it was noted, “We must make sure we don’t get any more home church people in here.”

Yet that Independent Ministry is being supported by tithe sent in by people who are worshiping in home churches, and look to it to send speakers to speak in their home churches! Yet, back at headquarters, it forbids home churches!

After working there several years, this family (the father was for several years on the board of directors of that ministry) turned in their resignations and moved away.

Although workers have protested,

the situation continues unabated at that ministry. Families are pressured to continue attending local denominational churches, when they believe that, to continue doing so, will endanger their children’s spiritual welfare.

This is wrong! Those parents should not be pressured into doing what they do not believe they should do.

Why is such pressure being applied? The leadership is tired of resisting heavy conference and union opposition. Yet if reconciliation is their decision, they should publicly tell everyone, as Ty Gibson did. He came out openly and declared that he had met with conference officials, was making peace with them, and was returning funds to them.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

It is simple enough. *First*, make your own decision as to where you will worship, and let no man tell you what you are to do.

Second, if you decide to consider applying for a position as a worker at an Independent Ministry, ask them up front: “If I work for you, will I and my family be free to attend any church we want—denominational, home church, or worship at home alone?”

Then carefully consider the answer you receive. The question, “Are your workers free to worship anywhere they wish?” touches on a fundamental right.

Third, if you are on the board of an Independent Ministry, you should study the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, and make sure your organization is not trying to coerce the religious rights of your workers. You want the religious freedom to worship as you wish; why try to deny that same right to others? Are we so quickly come out of one coercive organization, that we must form another? Will we ever learn?

As a suggestive guideline for any group looking for a practical pattern, I will mention the one we have followed here for over a decade: We specifically tell prospective workers, up front, that they can attend any church they wish (denominational or home), or not attend at all if they choose. But we do set down two related requirements: If

they are to work here, (1) they are not to demand that others do as they do, and (2) only those itinerant speakers will speak on campus, which are teaching things which we believe are in agreement with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. However, they are free to attend any meetings off campus that they wish. And, in on-campus home churches, they are free to discuss whatever they wish as they see best.

That simple guideline has been quite adequate to insure personal religious liberty for our workers.

WILL THIS CAUSE HARDSHIP OR INCONVENIENCE?

Obedying your conscience, enlightened by the Inspired Writings, is more important than all else. It is better that you starve out on the street, than that you violate your right to worship as you see best.

Will asking for your worship rights from employers prove to be a hardship to them? Far from it, they have no right, in the first place, to control how you worship God!

By obtaining assurance in advance that your worship rights will be held inviolate, you help keep them from moving in the direction of popery. You are helping them keep on track. In addition, you are avoiding for yourself a hurtful separation experience later on. Find out to start with, what the place is like.

What should you do if your present employer limits where you and your family can worship? Pray about it earnestly, and act on your convictions. You did not compromise earlier to hold a job, why start now?

The older ones among us will recall the Norman Rockwell painting,

entitled "*The Four Freedoms*," reprints of which hung in post offices and stores all over America during World War II. As I recall, the four were "Freedom of Worship," "Freedom of Assembly," "Freedom of the Press," and "Freedom of Speech."

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees you the right to worship as you please. Let no church, employer, or preacher take it away from you.

SIGHING AND CRYING

In concluding this study, keep in mind the strong statements which appear in *5 Testimonies*, 212-216 and 472-475. Read both chapters thoughtfully.

We are to sigh and cry over the increasing apostasy in the churches of Adventism. Indeed, we are told that those only who do this will receive the seal of God!

Pilgrims Rest is sighing and crying. We are pointing out errors and wrongdoing, and pleading for changes. But all need to do so.

It is urgent that, those of us who leave the church because of apostasy,—continue sighing and crying to it!

That is the clear-cut position given in those two *Testimony* chapters. We are not to run away from the denomination and turn our backs on it. We are to continue to seek to counsel, warn, and instruct church members in the right way, as outlined in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. In addition, we are to do missionary work, and share missionary literature with those out in the world.

You may be one of those who have found that, to save your family, you

must worship apart from the mainline church. Yet you can still speak to church members and/or mail them tracts and papers that they need. — And you can keep praying for them.

EARLIER EXPERIENCES

The conference president that I worked under, when I was in the Adventist ministry, was a man who tried to force people on a variety of matters, such as church worship. For such reasons, I left the ministry.

Later, I moved my family to Sacramento, California,—and learned we were (at that time) close to the North American headquarters of both branches of the German Reform Church (they call themselves the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement).

While in that area, we made friends with many present and former German Reform members, who told us stories about the cruel, repressive tactics used by that organization to control the minds and worship of its members.

In later years, we also continued to see the sorry results of harsh measures of repression by the mainline church.

Fortunately, we have the Inspired Writings. They contain principles which are clear and which, in the strength of Christ, all can follow.

Let us practice liberty of worship; let us grant it to those around us.

— Vance Ferrell

"Attendance upon her service was required by law, and unauthorized assemblies for religious worship were prohibited."—*Great Controversy*, 290.

More WAYMARKS - from —

PILGRIMS REST

HCR 77, BOX 38A - BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TN 37305

"Only obedience to the requirements of Heaven will keep man from apostasy. God has bestowed upon man great light and many blessings; but unless this light and these blessings are accepted, they are no security against disobedience and apostasy. When those whom God has exalted to positions of high trust turn from Him to human wisdom, their light becomes darkness. Their entrusted capabilities become a snare."—*Prophets and Kings*, 83.

"Every Christian is a standard-bearer of righteous principles. Let there be no lowering of the standard, no

countenancing of wrong movements. It was while men slept that the enemy sowed tares among the wheat. It is the unwatchful, sleeping condition of God's servants that implicates them with their associates in guilt. The only way to escape being an unfaithful watchman is to watch and not allow to continue the evils that can be checked. To sustain by silence a work that God cannot approve is to abet Satan's work, and this results in the loss of souls. No one should be at ease until he has done all that it is possible for him to do to counterwork evil."—*16 Manuscript Releases*, 3.