

DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

VOTED, To adopt the following statement on Divorce, Remarriage and Church Membership and the guidelines on procedures which are included in it:

Divorce, Remarriage and Church Membership

1. Introduction

The institution of marriage originated in Eden when the Lord God united the first man, Adam, with the first woman, Eve, making them husband and wife. The divine purpose for marriage included both procreation and companionship (Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-24). Christ endorsed this concept of marriage (Matt 19:3-6); Paul supported the sanctity of marriage, and used it as an illustration of the union between Christ and His church (Eph 5:22-33). The church, therefore, believes that Christian marriage is a divinely sanctioned union between a believing man and a believing woman for their mutual support and happiness, and for the procreation and rearing of children who will in turn become Christians. Ideally, this union lasts until dissolved by the death of one of the partners.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, guided by Bible prophecy, has long foreseen a moral decline preceding the close of human history and the return of her Lord (Luke 21:26-30; Matt 24:37-39). The church eagerly awaits her Master's appearance, yet, at the same time, deplores the increase of evil that characterizes the period before His coming (2 Tim 3:1-5, 13). Her regret is deepened as the coming of the Lord is delayed and contemporary mores seep into the church, diluting observance of Christian standards, eroding adherence to divinely given principles, and threatening to reduce the Body of Christ to the same moral level as the world in which she lives.

Some of Satan's strongest assaults are made upon Christian marriage and the Christian home (Rom 1:24-27). If the enemy undermines these bulwarks of true religion, he undermines the church. It behooves the church, therefore, to resist both overt and furtive attacks upon her members' marriages and homes. She must not stand idly by and see their integrity attacked, their purity sullied, their witness nullified (Eph 6:10-17). She must uphold Christ's standards or perish. If she is true to her calling she need not consider the possibility of defeat; holding fast to her vocation, being holy as her Lord is holy, she can be sure of triumph.

Victory will demand faithful following of the revealed will of God in establishing marriage, in founding the home, in blessing married love, in interpreting Christ's ideals, and in formulating marital patterns approved by the church. This statement, therefore, in addition to suggesting ways to care for already-existing marital difficulties, also sounds a clarion call to maintain high Christian marriage standards in an increasingly corrupt world.

2. The Problem

If every marriage conformed to the ideal, this statement with its guidelines on procedures would not be needed. Unfortunately, some marriages are contracted between persons who fail to attain that mutual understanding and

## (Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

that physical, mental and spiritual harmony which enable two people to live happily as one. Disagreements lead to dissatisfaction and, with increasing frequency, even among Adventists, dissatisfaction leads to divorce. As the church seeks to maintain its Biblical standards, transgressors are disfellowshipped. Many regret that loss and request readmission to the church. The pastor, the church board, the conference, union, and division administrations face perplexing situations and the church searches for acceptable solutions to problems that affect the temporal and eternal welfare of the marriage partners and their children. (See Appendix C, below and the Scripture references there.)

Where the way of divorce is taken, the parties and the church must make difficult and serious decisions. The individuals must decide whether to remain single or to remarry, whether to renounce church membership or to seek to preserve or renew it. Where the reasons for divorce are complex, the church must determine the eligibility for continued membership, and the conditions under which readmission to church membership may be granted.

The guidelines in this statement are designed primarily to help answer questions related to the readmission to church membership of remarried divorced persons. Such study inevitably touches on the topics of divorce and remarriage, but the main concern is to furnish practicable procedures that will enable the church to deal consistently and helpfully with remarried divorced people who seek admission or readmission to membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The guidelines are intended to assist in the administration of the church's policy on divorce and remarriage as it was adopted at the 1958 Session of the General Conference in Cleveland and as it appears in the Church Manual (1971), pages 251-256. It makes no change in it. Furthermore, nothing in the guidelines is to be construed to mean that by them the church is taking the stand that every divorced person who remarries may be readmitted to church fellowship. Each case must be considered on its merits with the earnest purpose of upholding church standards and the sanctity of the Christian home.

In certain cases referred to Ellen White regarding married couples of whom at least one partner had been previously divorced, she counselled that they should not be compelled to separate and/or return to their former spouses. However, she makes it very clear that in God's sight "the violation of the marriage bed" is the only ground for divorce. (See Appendix A, below.) Nothing in this statement or in the guidelines is to be understood or construed as either encouraging or condoning the free and easy divorce and remarriage so prevalent today. Much thoughtful care, therefore should be exercised in the implementation of the guidelines.

### 3. Church Membership

a. Church Manual Instruction. The Church Manual, chapter 15, pp 251-256\* outlines the church's policy concerning divorce, remarriage, and readmission to church membership. Paragraphs 7, 8, and 9 (pp 255, 256) specifically instruct the local church on acceptable procedures for readmission to the church of those who have been disfellowshipped because of marital irregularities:

\*All Church Manual references in this statement apply to the 1971 edition.

## (Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

"7. A guilty spouse who has violated his (or her) marriage vow and has been divorced and disfellowshipped and who has remarried, or a person who has been divorced on other than the grounds set forth in Section 1 and has remarried, and who has been disfellowshipped from the church, shall be considered as standing under the disapproval of the church and thus ineligible for membership except as herinafter provided.

"8. The marriage contract is not only more sacred but often also infinitely more complex than ordinary contracts in its possible involvements; for example, in the factor of the children who may be born. Hence, in a case where any endeavor by a genuinely repentant offender to bring his marital status into line with the divine ideal presents apparently insuperable problems, his (or her) plea for readmittance shall before final action is taken be brought by the church through the pastor or district leader to the conference committee for counsel and recommendation as to any possible steps that the repentant one, or ones, may take to secure such readmittance.

"9. Readmittance to membership of those who have been disfellowshipped for reasons given in the foregoing sections, shall be on the basis of rebaptism."

b. Implementation of Church Manual Instruction. The church, as a unified body, needs to enable its widely-scattered component members to follow uniform procedures in matters that so deeply affect its corporate spiritual welfare as the readmission of members who have been disfellowshipped for reasons involving divorce and remarriage. The persons and bodies involved, the criteria that should receive consideration and the procedure to be followed in implementing the Church Manual instruction are listed and outlined in the following guidelines on procedure:

1) Advisory Committees and the Pastor

a) Union Conference Standing Committee on Divorce and Remarriage. Each union conference executive committee shall appoint a standing committee on divorce and remarriage. Its primary purpose shall be to ensure that the church's high standards in regard to Christian marriage and the sanctity of the home are maintained throughout the union. It shall give guidance to local conference standing committees on divorce and remarriage and seek to make certain that proper standards are applied consistently throughout the union in the readmission to church membership of remarried divorced persons. It may also give guidance to conference standing committees on divorce and remarriage in connection with specific cases referred to it for counsel. Included in the membership of this committee whenever possible should be competent and experienced persons in the field of marriage counseling.

b) Local Conference Standing Committee on Divorce and Remarriage. Each local conference executive committee shall appoint a standing committee on divorce and remarriage to which requests for readmission to church membership of disfellowshipped divorced and/or remarried persons shall be

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

referred by a pastor and/or a local church for study and counsel before consideration by the church board and the church. It is desirable that the union ministerial association secretary be included in the membership of this committee.

c) The Pastor. The role of the pastor in dealing with requests for readmission to church membership is central. He should receive the request, counsel with the applicant, assemble the background information regarding the case, submit it to the Conference Standing Committee on Divorce and Remarriage, and in taking it to the church board and the church business meeting, faithfully follow the counsel received and the guidelines on procedure.

2) Criteria for Readmission to Membership. In seeking to fulfill the requirements set forth in the Church Manual, pp 253-256, the applicant for readmission to membership shall give evidence to the church that the Holy Spirit has done effective work in his heart since the dissolution of his previous marriage and his remarriage. The church, in turn, shall apply the following criteria in an assessment of the genuineness of his repentance and the validity of his appeal for reinstatement:

a) The applicant shall have revealed sincere repentance for his violation of the divine ideal of marriage, for the damage done to the fair name of the church, and for the adverse effect of his actions upon members and community.

b) The applicant shall have confessed his wrongdoing to those whom he has most harmed and endeavored to make to them such restitution as lies within his power.

c) The applicant shall have given evidence of genuine repentance by a renewal of Christian experience, by the development of a wholesome family life, and by the establishment of a praiseworthy reputation within the church and the community.

d) The applicant shall have availed himself of the privilege of attending the services of the church and of participating in its spiritual and social blessings. Participation in the church's activities nurtures a healthy relationship with the church body and creates a favorable climate for reinstatement of membership. He should be encouraged in these attitudes by the pastor, the church officers, and the church members. (See Church Manual, pp 240, 241)

e) The applicant shall have recognized, with church and state, that divorced persons may have moral and financial obligations related to a previous marriage. Where child care and financial obligations are determined by a court, the true Christian will be faithful to such responsibilities. Before a divorced or remarried divorced person is readmitted to church membership, the local church leadership shall investigate to ensure that such obligations are being faithfully fulfilled to the best ability of the candidate for membership.

## (Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

The applicant shall endeavor to fulfill each of the above criteria in a voluntary, cooperative spirit and not under the urge of external compulsion.

The church should, if necessary, help the partner who is judged innocent to show Christian forbearance toward the former spouse who is seeking readmission to the church, and to be willing to forgive past wrongs even if reunion in marriage is inadvisable or impracticable.

3) Procedures. When a new believer is to be admitted to membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he stands, in relation to the church, as a "new creature," (2 Cor 5:17) not subject to church discipline for his past conduct. He shall be eligible for church membership if his current marriage is legally certificated. In unusual circumstances where compliance with this condition appears to be inadvisable or impossible, his case shall be treated according to the procedure used for former members.

When a former Seventh-day Adventist, disfellowshipped because of adultery resulting in divorce, or for marriage after divorce, requests readmission to membership the local church shall ensure, when considering the request, that the following procedure is followed.

a) A period of years shall be required between the time of divorce and application for readmission to church membership where there has been no remarriage or between remarriage and application for readmission to church membership. Such a period of years should be adequate to give sufficient time for revealing the reality of a renewed Christian experience, the healing of wounds caused by the dissolution of the former marriage and for demonstrating the stability of a new home in the case of remarriage. In one of the very few statements issued jointly by James and Ellen White the following counsel was given in the Review and Herald, March 24, 1868:

"...it is a feature in the cases of most who have been overtaken in sin, ...that they have no real sense of their villainy. Some, however, do and are restored to the church, but not until they have merited the confidence of the people of God by unqualified confessions and a period of sincere repentance. . . ." (AH 346)

The period of time shall also be regarded as disciplinary, in the spirit of love, showing the church's strong disapproval of acts such as the one that brought about the disfellowshipment. A most important responsibility in dealing with such cases is the upholding of the high standards of the church and the sanctity of the Christian home.

b) The application for readmission shall be placed in the hands of the local church pastor.

c) The pastor shall assemble relevant factual information concerning the circumstances of any divorce and/or remarriage of the applicant.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

d) The pastor shall submit the request for readmission for church membership to the local Conference Committee on Divorce and Remarriage for counsel prior to presenting the case to the church board and the church.

e) The request shall be considered by the church board, taking into full account the counsel received from the local Conference Committee on Divorce and Remarriage.

f) A duly-called church business meeting shall decide on the request for readmission, taking into account the counsel of the church board and the local Conference Committee on Divorce and Remarriage.

g) Approval of requests for readmission to church membership shall require a two-thirds majority vote of the church business meeting. The unity and authority of the church must be upheld in handling such requests. Furthermore, the admission of divorced and remarried divorced persons must not cause the community to question the attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward the sanctity of marriage.

h) Those disfellowshipped on the grounds of divorce and remarriage shall be readmitted to membership only by baptism (Church Manual, p 256).

i) Pastors shall use the information blank prepared for referrals when consulting the conference and union committees.

It must be recognized that in the ~~breakdown~~ of marriage there are degrees of culpability which must be taken into account as the church considers requests by the disfellowshipped for reinstatement into church membership. In some instances the sin may be so flagrant and the dishonor brought to the church so extensive, that readmission to church membership may not be possible. However, repentant individuals should be forgiven by the church, and granted the privilege of spiritual and social fellowship.

While the marital breakup of any Christian couple bring some embarrassment to the church, the effect is much greater if the person involved is a minister. And while adultery is a sin regardless of who commits it, "the sin is of tenfold greater magnitude" when committed by a minister (2T 458). Since both the injury to the church and the reproach upon it are intensified when leaders fail to uphold God's standards in marriage, the church should be more cautious in considering the request of a disfellowshipped minister for readmission to church membership.

c. Right of Appeal. A former member who feels, after the processes outlined in the foregoing sections 3-b-3)-a) to i) have been followed, that his request for readmission to the church has not received adequate or proper consideration may request the pastor to refer his case again to the local Conference Committee on Divorce and Remarriage. Should he feel that consideration by this body is not adequate, he may ask for a full and impartial hearing by the local conference executive committee in harmony with the rights provided in the Church Manual, pp 241, 242.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

4. The Pastor and Counseling

Pastors as counselors should consider and apply the following suggestions:

a. Jesus always pointed to the ideal, and the church should do likewise. Jesus did everything possible to save and improve life, not to destroy, and the church should do likewise. Achievement of the ideal is not always possible, but it should be attempted before less-than-ideal steps are taken.

b. In all cases, whatever the disruptive causes, pastors should explore the possibilities for preserving marriages that are appearing to disintegrate. Husbands and wives should be encouraged to renew their vows and refresh their love for each other (see Church Manual, p 253, par 2). Pastors should not lightly advise that divorce be undertaken; to the contrary, it is usually better to refer the couple to a competent Christian marriage counselor. The decision to undertake divorce proceedings must, in any case, be the individual's personal responsibility, and not be that of a third party. The threat of divorce and its aftermath may lead the partners to renew their love and mutual faithfulness and bring them lasting married happiness.

c. When alienation has advanced too far for reconciliation, separation by mutual consent or by legal enactment may be necessary, or the partners may decide on divorce. When the way of divorce is chosen, pastors should do everything possible to keep the participants from precipitously entering into new marital relationships. Unless time is taken for searching self-examination and a sober evaluation of reasons for the failure of the first marriage, it is extremely easy for a divorced person to become emotionally involved with another party as a rebound from the previous unhappiness, and to commit mistakes similar to those that ruined the previous marriage.

d. The pastor should try to understand both parties and their respective viewpoints. He should be slow to categorize one as "guilty" and the other as "innocent." At times, serious faults on both sides contribute to the breakdown of marriage. The one considered "innocent," for example, may have contributed to the other's wrongdoing.

e. Due weight should be given to the impact that divorce and/or remarriage have on the church and on the community. Some marriages may be saved when the estranged couple are confronted with the predictable shock their divorce would cause to those whom they love and respect. They should be urged to consider their own responsibility for preserving the fair name of the church.

f. While it is necessary to be sure that the adultery which is cited as grounds for divorce has in fact occurred, its occurrence need not always be publicized in legal divorce proceedings. Irrespective of the extent of proven guilt, it is rarely necessary to give publicity to the unsavory fact to the detriment of those involved. The spirit of the Master should motivate investigations, counselings, and all remedial measures that are undertaken.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

g. In addition to the fact that the former mate has committed adultery or fornication, there are other important factors related to the question of remarriage. Applicants need to face the truth about their own personalities, about their own past marital experiences, and about the effect the proposed remarriage will have on members of their own family, church, and community. The assistance of a Christian marriage counselor can be immensely valuable in such confrontation.

h. Where, after careful counsel, remarriage is decided upon, the dictates of good taste will favor a private ceremony.

i. In all their dealings with parties to divorce and/or remarriage, the pastor and his associates will be discreet, keeping confidences locked in their own minds, working always for the salvation of their brethren and sisters, and being careful not to contribute to the gossip that so often harms individuals and churches.

5. The Church Members' Attitude Toward the Disfellowshipped

Those who have been disfellowshipped because of divorce and its concomitants are often keenly conscious of the loss of membership, and deeply miss the fellowship of their church friends. They sometimes conclude that heaven's gate is closed against them and that church members have lost the love they once had for them. These conclusions usually stem from two sources: (1) a sense of their own guilt, leading to self-condemnation, and, (2) the fact that some members avoid them for fear of appearing to sanction acknowledged misconduct.

Ellen G White has some cogent counsel for such a situation:

"If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves lest they also be tempted." (7T 263)

A patient, consistent, fraternal Christian attitude will do much to rehabilitate the disfellowshipped one until the day when he can once again take his place in church life as a rebaptized member.

When an erring one finds it exceedingly difficult to return to church fellowship, the need for tactful care is all the greater, but brotherly love can still be effective in healing wounds and restoring normal Christian relationships.

While the terms "guilty" and "innocent" are frequently used in labeling the parties involved in marital breakup, the church should recognize that in



## (Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

many cases both partners share responsibility for the failure. The church, therefore, should use great care in describing the parties to a divorce, and avoid judgmental terms.

During the waiting period disfellowshipped persons should not be discouraged from attending and benefiting from the spiritual and social meetings of the church. However, the Church Manual counsel (p 256, par 10) should be faithfully observed:

"When a person who has been involved in divorce proceedings is finally readmitted to church membership, as provided in section 8, every care should be exercised to safeguard the unity and harmony of the church by not giving such a person responsibility as a leader; especially in an office which requires the rite of ordination, unless by very careful counsel."

6. Inter-Church Ethics in Admitting Members

When former Adventists apply for church membership, the circumstances which led to loss of membership should be reviewed. Courtesy, as well as questions of church order, make it desirable that the church of their former affiliation be consulted concerning the proposed reestablishment of membership. Neglect of such a courtesy might be tantamount to flouting the disciplinary action of a sister church. Fulfillment of the courtesy might enable the former church to supply information that would sound a note of caution, or indicate that more time should elapse before the reestablishment of church membership. Moreover, the former church has a right to express its convictions on the proposal, and its counsel might prove invaluable concerning the propriety of readmitting the former member.

Should a difference of opinion arise between two churches concerning the admission of members, the matter should be referred to the local conference officers for counsel.

7. Conclusion. It is recognized that the guidelines set out in this document provide no facile solutions to the complex subject with which they attempt to deal. Nevertheless they do represent an earnest effort to face the realities of situations arising from divorce and remarriage in the ranks of Seventh-day Adventists. They represent a sincere endeavor to formulate acceptable procedures for administering Church Manual recommendations and their derivatives. It is recognized that the guidelines will not solve every problem connected with requests for readmission to church membership by those who have been divorced and remarried, but it is hoped that the following additional recommendations will bring wide study to bear on stubborn difficulties and will contribute to a more uniform and consistent application of agreed procedures throughout the conferences and unions of North America.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

Appendices

Appendix A. A Brief Review of the Spirit of Prophecy Counsels Relating to Divorce, Remarriage and Church Membership

1. Marriage is for Life

"This vow links the destinies of the two individuals with bonds which naught but the hand of death should sever." (AH 340)

"Marriage, a union for life is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church." (7T 46)

2. Legally Divorced but Still Married in God's Sight

"A woman may be legally divorced from her husband by the laws of the land and yet not divorced in the sight of God and according to the higher law. Although the laws of the land may grant a divorce, yet they are husband and wife still in the Bible light, according to the laws of God. There is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband and wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God." (AH 344)

3. Adultery Alone Can Break the Marriage Tie

"Your ideas in regard to the marriage relation have been erroneous. Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow. . . . God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was adultery." (AH 341, 342)

"I would say that there is only one thing for which a husband may lawfully separate from his wife or a wife from her husband, and that is adultery. If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions?" (AH 345)

4. Adultery and Church Membership

"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 it 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 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

## (Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

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 or the privileges of the house of God" (Ms 3, 1854, Feb 12, 1854)

5. The Lord Will Forgive the Truly Penitent

"Put your will on God's side of the question; place yourself no longer in the position of a sinner, a harlot. You may not see clearly how you will obtain deliverance from the sins which have been cherished, and strengthened with repetition. The only way is to confess your sins, forsake them, and believe that Jesus alone will pardon you. Your deliverance is to be found in Christ and Him alone. Your temper and your pride must die and Christ live in you, else you are still in the bondage of sin and iniquity. You must humble your heart before God and Jesus will pity and save you.

"You have been living in adultery so long that sin does not appear heinous to you. You love sin. If now you want to leave sin, you must forever renounce it. If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." (Letter 24a, 1890, Jan 26, 1890)

"In regard to the case of the injured sister, A. G., we would say in reply to the questions of \_\_\_\_\_ that it is a feature in the cases of most who have been overtaken in sin, as her husband has, that they have no real sense of their villainy. Some, however, do and are restored to the church, but not till they have merited the confidence of the people of God by unqualified confessions and a period of sincere repentance." (AH 346, a statement published in the Review and Herald and signed jointly by James and Ellen White)

6. Public Exposure Not Always Necessary

"As your case has been opened before me, and as your sins have been pointed out to me, I have kept them to myself, hoping that a time would come when your hard spirit might be softened. I now implore you to seek the salvation of your soul before it shall be forever too late." (Letter 23a, 1890, Jan 14, 1890)

"May the Lord send most deep convictions to your soul, for I never want to give publicity to the things which I have been shown, and I hope you will take a course which will make it unnecessary for me to do this." (Letter 24a, 1890, Jan 26, 1890)

7. Divorce and Remarriage Mrs White gave counsel on a few cases of those divorced on unscriptural grounds and remarried. Her counsel was consistent and one case is referred to here. Elder A held ministerial credentials in the early nineties when he became infatuated with a young woman, later deserted and divorced his wife and married the new object of his affections.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

He, of course, lost his credentials and Ellen White subsequently addressed him as "Mr A." The experience of the ensuing years was checkered but he remained with his second wife.

Later there were endeavors on the part of close relatives of the man to press him to divorce his second and remarry his first wife. Concerning this Mrs White wrote in 1901,

"I have just read your letter concerning Mr. A. I regard the matter in the same light that you do, and think it a cruel, wicked thing that the father of Mr. A should take the course that he is taking; . . . I would say that his case cannot be improved by leaving the present wife. If would not better the case to go to the other woman in the question."

She wrote further,

"I am not so sorry for the man; for his course is in such a shape that it will not answer to be meddled with, for there are difficulties upon difficulties. I would say that the Lord understands the situation, and if Mr. A will seek Him with all his heart, He will be found of him. If he will do his best, God will pardon and receive him.

"Oh, how precious it is to know that we have One who does know and understand, and will help the ones who are most helpless. But the rebuke of God is upon the father and the brother who would drive to destruction and perdition one who stands in the sight of God under no worse condemnation than themselves; and yet they will so use their gifts of speech as to dishearten, discourage, and drive Mr. A to despair." (Letter 175, 1901)

As time went on further counsel was given regarding this case and involving the manner in which Mr. A might serve in the local church which implies, of course, that he was holding church membership. In 1902 Mrs White wrote:

"I am fully convinced that Mr. A should be given encouragement to stand forth in the strength of the Lord as an overcomer. I see no reason why he should be hounded to death by his fellowmen, when the Lord Jesus says, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. . . . And I will turn my hand upon thee, and surely purge away thy dross, and take away thy sin.'

"I see no reason why we should not encourage Mr. A to be a worker in the Lord's vineyard. The cleansing of the soul from sin includes the gifts of forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. And the inward cleansing of the heart is shown by the outward cleansing of the life.

"God's mercy to those who sincerely repent and come to Him through Christ, knows no limit. He will pardon the most guilty, and purify the most polluted.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

"Mr. A's case has been a trouble to me, but I have a more distinct light on it, and I will now say that if Mr. A keeps close to the Lord Jesus, he will be safe; for Christ has pledged His infinite power, faithfulness, and love to save to the uttermost. Let Mr. A know that I have written this." (Letter P-41, 1902, March 18, 1902)

It might be asked what was intended by the suggestion that the brother might be encouraged "to be a worker in the Lord's vineyard"? Here is the answer:

By context and related statements it is clear that Ellen White suggests that Mr A could assist in the work of the Lord as a layman, not as an ordained minister. See W C White's statement of September 15, 1911:

"Mother does not wish to take large responsibility in this matter; but she says regarding Mr. A as she has said regarding other men in a somewhat similar position, if they have thoroughly repented, if they are living such lives as convince their brethren that they are thoroughly in earnest, do not cut them off from fellowship, do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility." See The Spirit of Prophecy and Adultery, Divorce, Remarriage and Church Membership, pp 27, 28.

Later in her own handwriting Mrs White wrote on a copy of W C White's letter quoted above, "This is correct advice in such cases. Let him walk humbly before God. I see no light in giving him responsibilities."

#### 8. Breaking up Wrongful Marriages

"Your letter has been received and read. I have had acquaintance with several such cases and have found those who felt conscientious to do something in similar cases to the one you mention. After having stirred things up generally, and torn things to pieces, they had no wisdom to put things together to make matters better. I found that those who were so zealous to tear things down did nothing to build them up in right order. They had the faculty to confuse, distress, and create a most deplorable conditions of things, but not the faculty to make them better.

"You have asked my counsel in regard to this case; I would say that unless those who are burdened in reference to the matter have carefully studied a better arrangement, and can find places for these where they can be comfortable, they better not carry out their ideas of a separation. I hope to learn that this matter is not pressed and that sympathy will not be withdrawn from the two whose interests have been united.

"I write this because I have seen so many cases of the kind, and persons would have great burden till everything was unsettled and uprooted and then their interest and burden went no further. We should individually know that we have a zeal that is according to knowledge. We should not move hastily in such matters, but look on every side of the question; we should move very cautiously and with pitying tenderness, because we do not know all the circumstances which led to this course of action.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

"I advise that these unfortunate ones be left to God and their own consciences, and that the church shall not treat them as sinners until they have evidence that they are such in the sight of the Holy God. He reads hearts as an open book. He will not judge as man judgeth." (Letter 5, 1891)

9. Counsel in Difficult Cases

There are records of other cases in which Mrs White gave counsel on difficult cases and these records furnish us with some guidance. But she emphasized

a. The important of earnest prayer and fasting to know the will of the Lord

b. The wisdom of using, as far as possible, those who dealt with a case in its beginnings in helping to reach later decisions

c. And the fact that she did not wish anything to go from her pen that could be used as a law or rule in dealing with such matters. Note the following:

"I do not think any such letters as that ought to be placed before me. I do not think it is my work to deal with any such things, unless the case has been plainly opened before me. There should be brethren in the church who have wisdom, who can speak decidedly regarding this case. . . . If they cannot settle such things among themselves by prayer and fasting, then let them continue fasting and prayer till they can.

"Such things will arise. It will come,--that is, they will have these difficult questions, and they have got to learn how to treat them. They have got to have an experience. They must bring these things to the Lord, and believe the Lord will hear their prayer, and give them a sound experience in all these things, but they are not to bring them to me. . . ." (Ms 2, 1913, Jan 14, 1913) [Ms release #448, pp 29, 30]

Note what her son, W C White who assisted his mother for many years wrote:

"Mother says that those who have dealt with the perplexities arising from his many transgressions in the past should take the responsibility of advising regarding our present duty toward him. Mother does not wish to take large responsibility in this matter; but she says regarding Elder A as she has said regarding other men in somewhat similar position, if they have thoroughly repented, if they are living such lives as convince their brethren that they are thoroughly in earnest, do not cut them off from fellowship, do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility." (W C White statement, 1913)

"Those who see his actions day by day, should know whether he has proved himself, whether God accepts him. . . . Let those appointed of God to bear the responsibility deal with it in accordance with Christian principles." (Ms 2, 1913, Jan 14, 1913)

(Divorce and Remarriage)

Again note the words of W C White:

"After reading the documents I today send you, you will say, Well, he has not given me anything authoritative from Sister White that directly answers the question; but I think you will see from what I am sending you that it was Sister White's intention that there should not go forth from her pen anything that could be used as a law or a rule in dealing with these questions of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and adultery.

"She felt that the different cases where the devil had led men into serious entanglement were so varied and so serious, that should she write anything that could be considered as a rule for settling such cases, it would be misunderstood and misused." (W C White letter, Jan 6, 1931)

10. Error on the Side of Mercy

If we err, let it be on the side of mercy. Note the balance of firmness and tenderness in the following counsel.

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

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

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

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

"I wish that we had much more of the spirit of Christ and a great deal less self and less of human opinions. If we err, let it be on the side of mercy rather than on the side of condemnation and harsh dealing." (Letter 16, 1887, April 21, 1887, to G I Butler, president of the General Conference)

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

Appendix B. Marriage - Religious and Sociological Considerations

Understanding of marriage and its history is essential if right solutions are to be found to the problems raised by the breakdown of a marriage.

1. Religious (Seventh-day Adventist)

The institution of marriage originated in Eden when the Lord God provided the first man Adam with the first woman Eve, making them husband and wife. The divine purpose for marriage included both procreation and companionship (Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-24). Christ endorsed this concept of marriage (Matt 19:3-6); Paul supported the sanctity of marriage, and used it as an illustration of the union between Christ and His church (Eph 5:22-33). The church, therefore, believes that Christian marriage is a divinely sanctioned union between a believing man and a believing woman for their mutual support and happiness, and for the procreation and rearing of children who will in turn become Christians. Ideally, this union lasts until dissolved by the death of one of the partners.

2. Sociological

Society generally recognizes marriage as a basic institution. Traditionally it has been a contract not only between a man and a woman, but between their respective families who are interested in perpetuating the family name; however, in most modern societies, the contract is solely between a man and a woman. From a legal viewpoint, marriage includes mutual obligations between the partners, but it differs from business contracts in not being negotiable.

Since creation and the fall of man, there have been many changes in the family, and hence, in the meaning of the marriage contract: changes in roles--what family members are expected to do; changes in authority--who has the right to issue orders to others in the family; greater use of contraception, with fewer children in the family, and lower infant mortality; changes in life cycle--longer life expectancy, with more time alone for the parental couple after the children have left home. But probably the most far-reaching change in the family is from the child-centered functions (the replenishing of the earth) to what may be termed personal or reward functions--love, gratification of sexual needs for other than procreative purposes, and companionship, which in the eyes of society are rewards even though they may have been included in God's original purpose for marriage. These changes mean that what used to be reward is now goal--that for which one marries. Placement of rewards in the primary position weakens family bonds, for satisfaction of a need is more elusive than production of a child. Happiness should result from a satisfactory marriage relationship diligently cultivated, but the new emphasis on happiness as the sine qua non of marriage leads to a higher divorce rate. The cry, "But we aren't happy!" means "I must have married the wrong person," and, far too often, the marriage disintegrates.

The marriage relationship should provide both partners with an ideal opportunity for the development and exercise of selfless, agape love, in contrast to selfishness and merely erotic love. One of the supreme concerns of true love is for the happiness and well-being of the other partner.



(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

Marriage thus conceived and realized makes it one of life's supreme opportunities for cultivating a mature Christian character.

#### Appendix C. Adultery and Fornication

One of the major questions to be answered concerns what constitutes, in the eyes of the church, valid grounds for divorce and, hence no impediment to remarriage. Most Christian communions cite Christ's words as recorded in Matt 5:32 and 19:9: "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (Matt 5:32); "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." (Matt 19:9) From these passages most churches conclude that "fornication" is the only scripturally permissible ground for divorce. The Seventh-day Adventist Church concurs in this initial interpretation, and concludes that divorce for any other cause than "fornication" (here, sexual intercourse of a married person with other than his/her spouse), with subsequent remarriage, makes both parties guilty of adultery (Church Manual, pp 254, 255, par 6, 7). If either party engages in sexual intercourse with another besides his/her mate, the other party has justifiable grounds for divorce, and is therefore free to remarry without incurring the charge of adultery.

The application of these Bible-based principles is no easy matter. Human nature is exceedingly complex; no two cases are alike; each calls for separate study in the light of all possible relevant information, and in a sympathetic, Christian spirit.

These further observations should be borne in mind when considering the question of adultery and fornication in relation to divorce:

1. "Adultery" refers to voluntary sexual intercourse by a married person with someone other than his/her lawful spouse, or by an unmarried person with a married person.
2. "Fornication," in Biblical usage, is a broader term than "adultery." It refers to unchastity, prostitution, and immoral practices of many kinds by both married and unmarried people.
3. Matthew's gospel, in recording Christ's dicta in Matt 5:32 and 19:9, uses the Greek words porneia,--"fornication"--and moichaomai (related to the noun moicheia, "adultery")--"to cause to commit adultery or, in this specific context, "to be considered an adulteress." In those passages our Lord appears to point to porneia--"fornication"--as the only permissible ground for divorce. It must be remembered, however, that Christ was not primarily defining grounds for divorce, but, was upholding the permanence and sacredness of marriage against the prevalence of frivolous reasons for divorce which operated in contemporary Jewish society. To that end He declared that any man divorcing his wife for any cause other than that of her having committed fornication was causing her and her next husband, in the case of remarriage, to commit adultery, since, without acceptable grounds for divorce, she was still the wife of the husband who had frivolously divorced her.

(Divorce and Remarriage - contd)

4. The Christian church has tended to take a restricted view of "fornication" in this context, and has generally limited its reference to proven adultery. It is possible, however, to give the term a broader interpretation and to include many sexual irregularities on the part of one partner or of both as valid reasons for divorce. "Fornication," as related to questions of divorce, can possibly include the following:

a. Perversions of, and deviations from, a normal sex life, which either do not disappear with treatment, or for which no therapy is sought. The evaluation of the emotional illness and the degree to which it physically and psychologically annuls the accepted pattern of sex behavior in a Christian marriage is to be made by the minister in consultation with a Seventh-day Adventist psychiatrist, psychologist, or qualified marriage counselor.

b. Homosexual practices are recognized as a misuse of sexual powers, and disapproved in scripture. As a violation of the divine intention in marriage, they thus become just cause for divorce.

c. Persistent indulgence in intimate relationships with a partner of the opposite sex other than the spouse, even though falling short of coitus, is a form of unfaithfulness, bordering on actual adultery, and may be contributory to divorce.

d. Lustful thoughts which do not result in overt acts of unfaithfulness should not be considered as grounds for divorce, for thoughts, although known to the omniscient God, and subject to judgment by Him, cannot be known by man nor are they to be considered grounds for divorce.

(A-1563) RETURNED MISSIONARIES--PLACING AND  
SUPPORTING - POLICY AMENDMENT

VOTED, To amend the first sentence of paragraph 2 of the policy "Placing and Supporting Returned Missionaries" (GC Working Policy, p 259) as follows:

2. Workers returning permanently from overseas service are allowed one month from the date of leaving the mission field for traveling, visiting and finding employment. Upon . . .

(A-1578) RETURNED MISSIONARIES--PLACING AND  
SUPPORTING - POLICY AMENDMENTS

VOTED, 1. To amend paragraph 4 a, lines 3-5 of the policy "Placing and Supporting Returned Missionaries" (GC Working Policy, p 260) as follows:

a. . .it being understood that in cases of workers other than ~~doctors-or-nurses~~ personnel engaged in nursing health-care service, . . .

(Returned Missionaries - contd)

2. To amend paragraph 4 l, lines 6-8 of the same policy (p 262) as follows:

1. . . . for children attending church school (grades 1-8) and denominational academies and colleges, as may be necessary to make a final settlement at its discretion.

3. To amend paragraph 4 m, lines 1, 2 of the same policy (p 262) as follows:

m. Scholarship grants will be allowed for children attending church school (grades 1-8) and denominational academies and colleges on the same basis . . .

(A-1704) FURLOUGHS--ELIGIBILITY FOR - POLICY  
REVISION

VOTED, To revise paragraph 19 of the policy "Eligibility for Furloughs" (GC Working Policy, pp 237, 238) by rewording and rearranging it to read as follows:

19. Woman Who Marries a National Worker--When a woman entitled to furlough/midterm leave marries a national worker, her husband's home division becomes her adopted base division and her relationship to the furlough policy is thereby altered and neither she nor her children nor her husband are entitled to regular furloughs/midterm leaves. However, a leave of absence of three months including travel time may be granted to her and her family after each five years of denominational service as may be arranged by the division committee in harmony with the following provisions:

a. The time for the first leave of absence is to be calculated from the time the single woman worker first arrived in the field or from the end of her last furlough.

b. The leave of absence is to be granted to the wife's former base division.

c. The leave of absence is to include the wife, the husband and the children up to their 18th birthday.

d. The worker (husband) is to continue to receive salary from his employing organization.

e. The transportation expense of the family is to be paid on the basis of regular furloughs.

Optional arrangements: Optional arrangements may be authorized by the division committee as follows:

a. If the wife or family desire a longer period of time in the wife's former base division for educational or other reasons, arrangements

Manuscript Release #448  
Replacing #393 which was  
not processed

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY AND ADULTERY, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE, AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP\*

Problems relating to (1) adultery and church membership, (2) divorce and remarriage of church members, (3) the breaking up of present marriage unions, and (4) church relationships of those involved.

THE SIN OF ADULTERY

An Early Ellen G. White Statement

The Lord gave us labor of spirit last first day [Sunday, Feb. 5, 1854], and while we were engaged in earnest prayer, I was taken off in vision and saw the state of some of the professed Israel of God. I saw the situation of many at our meeting in O \_\_\_\_\_. I saw that they were standing in the way of the work of God, especially those at C \_\_\_\_\_. I saw that God's frown was upon them, also upon some in R \_\_\_\_\_.

Said the angel, "The axe has not been laid at the root of the tree." Those who have indulged in the wicked passions of the heart have been fellow-shipped. If God had made Brother R an overseer of the flock, he would have seen the evil and corruption among the people. The axe has not been laid at the root of the tree. God has not altered nor changed. He is a jealous God, and will not look upon sin now with any more allowance than He did among ancient Israel. Sin is sin. Sins have not been held forth in their sinfulness, but it has been made to appear as though sins have been lightly regarded by God.

\*Note: This is a supplementary document. Ellen White's clear-cut counsels on divorce and remarriage as set forth in The Adventist Home, pp. 340-347, and Selected Messages, Book 2, pp. 339-342, are not repeated herein.

A Sin Bringing God's Frown

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 have 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 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 or 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."

Sinning With a High Hand

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 [unsanctified] 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 receivethem 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.--Ms 3, 1854 (Feb 12, 1854, "Testimonies for Churches in New York State").

A Greater Sin For Those Who Give Special Honor to God's Law

Even some who profess to keep all the commandments of God are guilty of the sin of adultery.\* What can I say to arouse their benumbed sensibilities? Moral principle strictly carried out, becomes the only safeguard of the soul.--2T 352

Not all who profess to keep the commandments of God possess their bodies in sanctification and honor. The most solemn message ever committed to mortals has been entrusted to this people, and they can have a powerful influence if they will be sanctified by it. They profess to be standing upon the elevated platform of eternal truth, keeping all of God's commandments; therefore, if they indulge in sin,

\*Note: Ellen White uses the term adultery and fornication interchangeably, drawing no line of distinction. Both are derived from the single Greek word. See BC Vol 6, p. 689

if they commit fornication and adultery, their crime is of tenfold greater magnitude than is that of the classes I have named [First-day Adventists], who do not acknowledge the law of God as binding upon them. In a peculiar sense do those who profess to keep God's law dishonor Him and reproach the truth by transgressing its precepts.

It was the prevalence of this very sin, fornication, among ancient Israel, which brought upon them the signal manifestation of God's displeasure. His judgments then followed close upon their heinous sin; thousands fell, and their polluted bodies were left in the wilderness. . . .

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Seventh-day Adventists, above all other people in the world, should be patterns of piety, holy in heart and in conversation.--  
2T 450-451

God's reproof has been plainly uttered against men and women who have sinned by corrupting their bodies and defiling their souls by licentiousness. They have the warnings to others placed in similar circumstances, who have been overcome by the tempter, and they know the displeasure of God rested upon them. . . . God has expressed condemnation of sin in all its forms. The sin of licentiousness is plainly rebuked and condemned. Men and women will be judged according to the light given them of God.--TM 437

#### TESTIMONIES TO A LONG STANDING ADVENTIST\* AND HIS MISTRESS

##### An Appeal to an Acquaintance of Many Years

My poor, deceived, sinful brother, I will now address a few words to you for whom I have had so great a burden and interest for many years.

\_\_\_\_ D, for years your course has been a sinful course. I have written to you, but have received no response, and the reproof given has had no effect upon your course of action. . . .

You have a work to do for your own soul. Make haste, or it will be

\*Note: The man addressed, a layman, for a few years carried certain responsibilities in connection with the business interests of one or two of our institutions. He was never ordained to the ministry.

forever too late. God will now forgive the scarlet sin if you will do those things you ought to do to make your wrongs right. I do not say your case is hopeless, but you have certainly almost sinned away your day of grace, and yet Jesus is in the sanctuary. Jesus pleads in your behalf. Your brethren and your sisters have labored much for you; so much interest have they manifested for you that you have regarded crime and sins as a light matter. But Jesus loves you and I present or lift up Jesus before you.

Satan tells you that it is not best for you to cease sinning; you have gone so far in disobedience and transgression that it is no use for you to try to come back to God. While I feel the full disgrace of your sins is upon you, while I would have you see sin as it is, I would all the time present Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour.

The sands of your life are nearly run out, and now if you will come to God just as you are without one plea, but that He has died to save the chiefest of sinners, you will find pardon even in this the eleventh hour. Man must cooperate with God. Christ did not die to have the power to cover transgression unrepented of and unconfessed. All sins are not to be confessed publicly, but some are to be confessed alone to God, and the parties that have been injured.

#### Christ's Imputed Righteousness

Righteousness of Christ imputed to men means holiness, uprightness, purity. Unless Christ's righteousness was imputed to us we could not have acceptable repentance. The righteousness dwelling in us by faith consists of love, forbearance, meekness, and all the Christian virtues. Here the righteousness of Christ is laid hold of and becomes a part of our being. All who have this righteousness will work the works of God. . . .



But the robes of Christ's righteousness never cover cherished sins. No one can enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb without the wedding garment on which is the righteousness of Christ. Without holiness no man shall see God. God is waiting to give divine power to every soul to combine with human effort. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and do of His good pleasure." Christ is the perfection of divine character. He is the model we are to follow. Peter's words are full of meaning: "As obedient children not fashioning yourselves according to the former lust in your ignorance, but as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy." . . .

John in Revelation, in his description of the New Jerusalem says, "And there shall in no wise enter in anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abominations or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. Well may you ask, "Is my name written there?" It is registered in that book of life if you have a character that is pure and holy like the character of Christ. Faith in the truth alone will not save us. We must be like Christ if we shall one day see Him as He is.

#### Purity and Righteousness Our Hope

"Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure." Any hope aside and separate from purity and righteousness is a snare of Satan, sophistry, and fatal delusion. Jesus came to our world and graciously stands inviting us to come unto him and learn of him. Believe in Him, and as we come, He grafts us into His life and into His character. Our drawing nigh to Christ is faith, and the grafting process

is adoption; and by this mutual act we become sons of God and joint heirs with Christ, partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

This ingrafting in Christ separates us from the world. No longer will we love the society of the vile and contaminated and contaminating. We will be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then rich clusters of fruit are borne. The graces of the Spirit are borne in love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness. We have new affections, new appetites, new tastes; old things have passed away, and, lo, all things have become new.

Now I ask you, Brother D, will you serve God with your whole heart, keeping all His commandments, or will you serve the devil? Will you, irrespective of consequences, put yourself on Christ's side? God will not force your service. It is life or death with you. If you come to Jesus, confessing your sins as an humble penitent, He will forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. You cannot turn from sin until you hate sin and love purity and truth and righteousness. I entreat you now to come just as a little child humbling your heart before God and Jesus will pardon your transgression.

Turn From the Society of the Ungodly

I hope E will no longer hold the influence over you that she has. If she does it is ruin, eternal ruin, to you both. You have much, altogether too much sympathy while your wife is wronged, deceived, robbed of the respect due her, your children robbed of that confidence which you should give them, to give to aliens. You have a work to do, and that without delay, or the wages of sin will be your portion.

Turn away from the society of the ungodly, devote every moment of your time in seeking the Lord while He may be found. You cannot live two lives, one for Christ and one for the devil. How long will you delight in sin itself, which is so abhorrent to God. All the sweet influences of the Spirit of God have become extinguished in your soul. Now change. I tell you not to be despairing, but to come to a merciful, sin-pardoning Saviour. Sever the links, disconnect from them.

You tremble to do this because you fear exposure. You cannot but be exposed ere long however much you may conceal your true condition. God has opened matters to me that I might encourage you to make another trial for your soul. You must choose between selfishness and sin on the one hand, and Christ, His purity and righteousness on the other. If you surrender to God heart, soul, and body you will no longer be the servant of sin. O I cannot endure the thought that one who has had so great light shall remain the servant of sin and of Satan.

There is no hope for you except in an entire transformation of character. Then you will try to honor Christ and to be like Christ. His law will be the rule of your life. Make haste to turn your feet in the path of holiness. Save your soul by casting yourself at the foot of the cross. Then come to Jesus and be happy, and go to heaven. Preaching is not all you need, but you need sins rebuked as Nathan rebuked David. "Thou art the man." You must have godliness, a pure heart, a perfect life, or die in your sins and perish with the ungodly.

May the Lord convince your soul, is my prayer.--Letter 1e, 1890  
(Jan 14, 1890

A MESSAGE TO THE MISTRESS

I have a few words to write to you. For some years your course has been open before me in connection with the family of \_\_\_\_\_ D, but these are hidden chapters in the experience of you both, which may have been surmised by some, that have been binding you together in unholy companionship. I hear that you and your brother have been converted, and if this report is true you will bring forth fruit meet for repentance. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.

You have held a strong influence over D. Your connection with him has been of that character that you well know, unless repented of and confessed, you will never see the kingdom of heaven. Can you sell your soul so cheaply? Is it possible that sin has lost its hideousness to you? I have not the slightest confidence in him whom I have long called Brother D.

His course has been opened before me in plain, distinct lines. No one knows that which I know of the wretched past. I never meant any one should know of it, but the end of D's life is not far off, and shall he go into eternity with his sins unconfessed, unrepented of? What will you say when you shall stand before the judgment bar of God?

Sin Does Not Appear Sinful

He has so long been following the impulses of his own corrupt heart, that sin does not appear to him exceedingly sinful. Now as your thoughts have been awakened to the serious thoughts of the salvation of your soul, I hope you see the hatefulness of sin; I hope you will now confess your sins before it shall be forever too late. If D dies as he is now, fastened in iniquity, what will you both have to meet in the judgment? Your course has

been a sad and distressing course in this matter. Did you think that God did not see these things? . . .

God's eye has been upon you. He has marked your deceptive course. You have alienated the affections of D from his long-suffering wife. You have held your influence over D and he dare not break it; he dare not displease you. You have misstated, falsified and borne your accusing statements against their own children, and have led him to think that his own children were not true and faithful to him, but were his enemies. You have, like the arch deceiver, framed lies, and have worked upon a mind that was degraded and cheapened, and perverted by his own sin to make him view things in altogether a distorted light.

Now if God has touched your heart, as I sincerely hope He has, you will humble your heart, you will fall upon the Rock and be broken. You will confess your sins, and forever forsake them and begin a new life. You will now have things brought to your remembrance, in regard to your course of action toward a worn, burdened child of God,--Sister D. She has had her faults, but she has not despised reproof. She has ever been ready to bow to the light and will of God.

But as your case has been opened before me, and as your sins have been pointed out to me, I have kept them to myself, hoping that a time would come when your hard spirit might be softened. I now implore you to seek the salvation of your soul before it shall be forever too late. The sins of fault-finding with Sister D are light in comparison with your sin and that of her husband. You have both been weaving a net about yourselves that has been growing firm as bands of steel, but the judgments of God will not be long deferred, if you continue on in the way you have been.

God keeps a record of the sins of nations and of individuals and when they have reached a certain measure they are full, then when the long forbearance of God is exhausted, his wrath slumbereth not. If necessary I can show you the reproofs given D. I can no longer call him Brother, for he is not a Christian. I have labored to keep him from the depths of despair, all the time hoping that he would see the evil of his course, that he would repent before he had grieved away the last ray of the mercy of God forever.

But I have been shown that he sets his mind and heart against right doing and receives your cruel influence as truth. You have helped him to turn from those who are his true friends, who would exert an influence to save his soul. It is time for me to speak. D does not want me to come to his home. He does not want me near him, for he fears God will rebuke his wicked course and yours.

I dare not keep these things from you. I hope you will now seek the Lord with your whole heart that you may find Him. Better go in humility all the rest of your life, than to lose your own soul, and be the means of other souls being lost through your course of action. Sin does not appear exceeding sinful to you, but God says, "I know thy works." So every deception you have practiced, every false word you have uttered, and to every unholy action there has been a watcher from whom you could not exclude yourself.

Little did Belshazzar think on that night of that sacrilegious feast that there was a messenger from heaven watching his every movement; and that night the performance in that palace brought the figures of his evil works to their full measure. He was no longer to be protected and shielded by God. The restraining power was no longer to ward off the evil, he was to

fall, his kingdom was to pass into other hands and his body was to be slain.

My heart is full of sadness. I inquire, Must these souls be left to come up in the second resurrection? Left to be outside the city of God among dogs and sorcerers and adulterers and those who loveth and maketh a lie? What can I say to you? You have a strong, hard spirit, unless you have fallen upon the Rock and are broken, The Lord has said, "Come, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while He is nigh. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

I beseech of you, let the work go deep, make thorough work. In the place of carrying your supposed grievances to D, a poor, erring, sinful mortal, to obtain sympathy, take your grievance to Jesus. He has invited you, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for My yoke is easy and my burden is light."--Letter 23a, 1890 (Jan 14, 1890)

A Second Letter to the Mistress

I again address you to not fail in this time which is the crisis of your life, to take the only right course left for you to take. The strong hold of sin is in the will. Put your will on God's side of the question; place your-

self no longer in the position of a sinner, a harlot. You may not see clearly how you will obtain deliverance from the sins which have been cherished, and strengthen with repetition. The only way is to confess your sins, forsake them, and believe that Jesus will pardon you. Your deliverance is to be found in Christ and Him alone. Your temper and your pride must die and Christ live in you, else you are still in the bondage of sin and iniquity. You must humble your heart before God and Jesus will pity and save you. Surrender to God, leave no sins unconfessed, send them beforehand to judgment, that they may be blotted out of the book of life. Make no secret reserve, and Jesus will pardon you.

You are, I was shown, connected in family relationship with those who are under the special controlling influence of the devil. Their feet take hold of hell. They are swift messengers of Satan. Any connection with even the mother that gave you birth, or other of your relations who are fastened in an evil course, will be corrupting to you. If you desire to be a Christian now is your time; now is the golden opportunity. You can only walk in purity by looking and beholding, praying and believing in Jesus moment by moment. You have been living in adultery so long that sin does not appear heinous to you. You love sin. If now you want to leave sin, you must forever renounce it. If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. You must not hide or excuse your sins, but you must arise and make haste to confess your sins and save your soul by seeking the forgiveness of your sins.

O, it is a terrible thing to be lost. Your course has been a sad and distressing one. Time is short. Will you now come? Will you sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him? There is hope for you, but you have had miserable



counselors, and if you love Jesus you hate the evil course and even the conversation and companionship of your own relatives who have given themselves soul, body, and spirit to work the works of Satan. He has control of their imaginations and evil intentions to do wickedly.

May the Lord send most deep convictions to your soul, for I never want to give publicity to the things which I have been shown, and I hope you will take a course which will make it unnecessary for me to do this.

--Letter 24a, 1890 (Jan. 26, 1890)

A Second Appeal to the Bewitched Old Man

To-day I have just received your response to my letter, and I can not rest to-night without writing to you again, and saying, Repent of your sins without delay. Your course has been opened before me; your management in business, your reckless expenditure of money, your associations with the vile and corrupt; and yet God is willing to pardon even you. . . . Had it not been for your unlawful, unholy connection with Miss E you would not have pursued so unnatural a course toward your own children. You have felt hard and unreconciled with ([a daughter]), but clung all the time to an harlot, and your commerce with her was of that character that your God-fearing children had none of your love, your sympathy. But my letter is not to condemn you, but to awaken you to repentance. I hear E has professed to be converted. This is the only time I dared to write to you or to her, knowing it would not do a bit of good, for the hardness of both your hearts and your stubbornness to pursue an evil course has been marvelous.

"Come Unto Me"

The bewitching power of Satan has been upon you. But make no delay; Jesus is at the right hand of God and mercy still lingers. "Come," says the Lord, "and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be as crimson, I will make them like wool." Yes; Jesus is the sinner's only hope. "Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money (no goodness, no righteousness, nothing to recommend him to God) come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price."

Can not you come just now, just as you are, saying,

"In my hand no price I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

"Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." . . .

A Change of Heart vs. Suicide

Consider these words. "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Do not, I entreat of you, sit down in hopeless despair and do nothing. Do not heed any farther the great tempter, that it is no use for you to try. You could but perish if you came to Jesus just as you are, sinful and polluted, vile and depraved; but Jesus is amply able to save the very hardest and the most wicked and defiled sinner.

You say you are tempted to cut the brittle thread of life, but if you do, then your case is hopeless, for you add the sin of murder to all your other sins. But if you come just as you are, helpless and sin-polluted, and cast yourself at the foot of the cross, poor, miserable, blind, and naked, there is a Saviour to lift you up. I know that you have not for many, many years been in harmony with God. You have for a long stretch of years been following another leader, which is the prince of darkness; but if you will cast off the works of darkness, if you will now look unto Jesus, you will live.

But you must look in faith. The true Christian life you have known nothing of for years. But while your powers have been so wasted and you have served Satan with a high hand, the Lord has heard prayer in your behalf, and has not cut you off in your sins which He might easily have done, if mercy were gone forever. Yes; God has heard the prayers of those whom you have refused to connect with; those who love God and keep the commandments. You have been utterly blind, deplorably deceived, deluded and ensnared by the devil. . . .

#### God Gives You Another Chance

Now year after year is gone, and God gives you through His delegated servant another chance. Will you repent? Will you confess your sins and forsake them? If you arouse your will power, relying wholly on the strength of Jesus, you will yet be an overcomer. But let the consequences be what they will, you must separate entirely from the class you have associated with. . . .

I can not give you up to be lost. You have been blind to all the higher interests of the soul, to all the blessed, glorious attractions of a heavenly life in the city of God. You have labored for that which is not bread; you have sacrificed peace, and honor, and sacrificed the companionship of the children of God, even your own children, that you might walk without obstructions in your own way. You have striven to content yourself in the secrets

2. If they would be liable to place themselves and their children in worse condition by a divorce, we know of no scripture that would make the innocent party guilty by remaining.

3. Time and labor and prayer and patience and faith and a godly life might work a reform. To live with one who has broken the marriage vows and is covered all over with the disgrace and shame of guilty love, and realizes it not, is an eating canker to the soul; and yet a divorce is a lifelong, heartfelt sore. God pity the innocent party! Marriage should be considered well before contracted.

4. Why! oh, why! will men and women who might be respectable and good and reach heaven at last sell themselves to the devil so cheap, wound their bosom friends, disgrace their families, bring a reproach upon the cause, and go to hell at last? God have mercy! Why will not those who are overtaken in crime manifest repentance proportionate to the enormity of their crime and fly to Christ for mercy and heal, as far as possible, the wounds they have made?\*---  
(Italics Supplied) RH March 24, 1868

#### THE CASE OF THE MAN THE CHURCH COULD NOT AGAIN FELLOWSHIP

It is impossible for E\*\* to be fellowshipped by the church of God. He has placed himself where he cannot be helped by the church, where he can have no communion with nor voice in the church. He has placed himself there in the face of light and truth. He has stubbornly chosen his own course, and refused to listen to reproof. He has followed the inclinations of his corrupt heart, has violated the holy law of God, and has disgraced the cause of present truth. If he repents ever so heartily, the church must let his case alone. If he goes to heaven, it must be alone, without the fellowship of the church. A standing rebuke from God and the church must ever rest upon him, that the standard of morality be not lowered to the very dust.-- Testimonies, Vol.1, p. 215

\*Note: This is one of the very few statements to be issued jointly by James and Ellen White. Inasmuch as it was signed by both the views expressed must be those of Ellen White.--Compilers.

\*\*Note: While no contemporary record of the nature of E's transgression is available, W. C. White declared it to be a particularly revolting case of incest.

THE MARRIAGE RELATION AND ADULTERYWhen Divorce is Justified

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 laws of God.

I saw that Sister \_\_\_\_\_, as yet, has no right to marry another man; but if she, or any other woman, should obtain a divorce legally on the ground that her husband was guilty of adultery, then she is free to be married to whom she chooses.--Adventist Home, p.344 (1863)

Marriage Vows Broken Only by Adultery

Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow. . . .God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was adultery. Let this ground be prayerfully considered.--Adventist Home, p. 341-342

THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The first Seventh-day Adventist delegated state conference session held at Monterey, Michigan, October 4-6, 1862, had before it four questions, the first of which read: "How shall we treat divorced marriages?" (RH Oct 14, 1862)

The term divorced marriages was defined as "those who have been divorced from their former husbands or wives for other causes than that mentioned in Matt. XIX, and under that divorce have married again. Shall such persons subsequently embracing present truth be received among us,"

The matter was referred to the conference committee. No record can be found of any recommendation or action.

When Counsel Was Sought From Ellen White

Quite naturally, down through the years specific cases were brought to Ellen White for counsel. Those in which she had specific light she dealt

with clearly, as the 1863 case referred to above. (Adventist Home, page 344.)

In cases brought to her attention, but in which she was not given special light, she either asked to be excused or gave counsel in very general terms. Her son, W. C. White, who assisted her for thirty-five years, on several occasions made reference to this. We present excerpts from two W. C. White letters:

Oct. 6, 1911

Dear Brother: Your letter to Mother, dated October 1, has been handed to me with the request that I write to you in reply.

Mother has received during the last twenty years many letters making inquiry regarding the matters about which you write, and she has many times written in reply that she had no advice to give different from that of the apostle Paul. Recently she has refused to deal with letters of this character, and tells us not to bring them to her attention.

My own views regarding this matter, which I believe to be in harmony with the counsel that I have heard Mother give to individuals years ago, and which I believe to be in harmony with views of the leading brethren and with the teaching of the Scriptures is that there is no blessing to come by our breaking up families who may have sinned or been sinned against before or since they embraced present truth.

January 6, 1931

Dear Brother: Yesterday I was able to give some time to the study of your letter, and I will now send to you copy of several documents which may be considered by you as having more or less bearing upon the subject which you have under consideration. I do not think that you will find in any of them a very direct answer to the question that has been put up to you. . . .

After reading the documents I today send you, you will say, Well, he has not given me anything authoritative from Sister White that directly answers the question; but I think you will see from what I am sending you that it was Sister White's intention that there should not go forth from her pen anything that could be used as a law or a rule in dealing with these questions of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and adultery.

She felt that the different cases where the devil had led men into serious entanglement were so varied and so serious, that should she write anything that could be considered as a rule for settling such cases, it would be misunderstood and misused.

It is also my conviction, Brother \_\_\_\_\_, that it would not be wise for you to respond to the request of Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ and endeavor to print something in the Review, that would be a guide for action. Whatever you write will be criticized by some and misused by others. It is my opinion that a letter giving counsel to the individual asking for it, will serve the purpose much better. (*Italics Supplied*)

Ellen White herself when asked in 1913 to give counsel regarding the Will Wales case (later referred to in this document) wrote:

I do not think any such letters as that ought to be placed before me. I do not think it is my work to deal with any such thing, unless the case has been plainly opened before me. There should be brethren in the church who have wisdom, who can speak decidedly regarding this case. I cannot understand such things. I do not know this man,\* and I do not believe God wants me to take any such burden upon me. If they cannot settle such things among themselves by prayer and fasting, then let them continue fasting and prayer till they can. . . .

[Elder W. C. White read portions of Elder McVagh's letter of August 15, 1911, after which Sister White said further:]

The case is such that I have had no particular light in regard to his case, therefore I dare not speak positively in regard to it.--  
Ms 2, 1913

#### Attitude of the White Estate

W. C. White, while he lived, and the White Estate staff since his death in 1937, have considered certain specific cases referred to or dealt with by Ellen White was illustrative and as of such a nature as to warn against the taking of unwarranted positions. In the light of her own stated relationship to these problems, the White Estate up to this time (1975) has released only those E. G. White statements which seemed to be clear-cut and fundamental. Such is found in the chapter on divorce in The Adventist Home pages 340-347, and "Counsels on Certain Marriage Situations" in Selected

\*Ellen White was now 85 years of age and her memory of this matters was evidently somewhat impaired.

Messages, Book 2, pages 339-342.

The White Estate is now called upon to make available those illustrative materials which may offer something not as hard and fast rules, but which may be useful in developing guidelines. In the Will Wales case most of the points of concern are illustrated: The question of breaking up of a present union, acceptance by God and the church when there is true repentance, the humble place to be taken by those involved, credentials, and the risk to the conference of their renewal to a minister who has violated the seventh commandment, and the responsibility the conference takes in such cases.

#### THE WILLIAM WALES CASE

[Counsel regarding the standing and activities of a minister divorced on unscriptural grounds and remarried.]

According to Mr. Wales' statement of January 13, 1913, Mrs. E. G. White addressed an early communication to him. This was probably written about the year 1876. We do not have a copy of the letter on file and have no knowledge of its contents.

W. C. Wales, age 29 and married, would have been ordained in 1886 at the Michigan camp meeting if he had not been absent because of illness (Review and Herald, Oct. 5, 1886, p. 616). He held ministerial credentials during the years 1890 and 1891. It was about this time that he became infatuated with a young woman, Myrtle Stebbins, whom he met at Battle Creek College, which experience led to the desertion of his wife for the newer object of his affection. He married Myrtle October 17, 1892. Although the experience of the ensuing years was checkered, he continued with the second wife.

In 1894, Mrs. White addressed a very brief note to Mr. Wales, in which



she alludes to and confirms counsel given by Elder Jones relative to Mr. Wales' responsibility in caring for a certain woman. This letter does not give much information as it does not make plain just what is referred to. We quote the letter, however, as follows:

(Letter 109, 1894)  
Norfolk Villa, Prospect St.  
Granville, NSW  
Sept. 18, 1894.

Mr. William Wales  
1183 Broadway  
Newton, Kansas

Dear Brother in Christ:

Your letter received, and in reply I would say that the words quoted from Elder Jones ("I think you ought to take her and take care of her")\*seem to point out the right course to be pursued under the circumstances. God bless and guide and keep you in the path of right.

(Signed) Ellen G. White

P. S. American mail received yesterday, and mail goes by Vancouver mail today, hence brief reply.

The next communication from Ellen White relative to William Wales bears date of November 4, 1901, and was addressed to one of our workers:

"I have just read your letter concerning Will Wales. I regard the matter in the same light that you do, and think it a cruel, wicked thing that the father of Will Wales should take the course that he is taking; but I have not dared to answer his letters. If anything can come from me through you to him, I would say that his case cannot be improved by leaving the present wife. It would not better the case to go to the other woman in the question.

---

\*Myrtle's younger sister in 1965 wrote that "Sister White was well acquainted with Will Wales," and she wrote that "It was Will Wales' place to take Myrtle and care for her."--(Mrs. C. W. Backertz's letter of February 3, 1965.)

"I consider the case of the father one that is singular, and his record is one that he will not be pleased to meet in the day of God. He needs to repent before God of his spirit and his work. The best thing for him to do is to cease to stir up strife. . . .

"I have not written to Will Wales, but know that if the father would repent before God and do his first works, and cease to consider himself as one that can help his son, he would ask himself the question, "Is my name written there, on the page white and fair?" He might well begin to humble himself before God, and leave Will Wales with God. Let the father and brother make diligent work for themselves. They both need the converting power of God. May the Lord help these poor souls to remove spot and stain from their own characters, and repent of their wrongs, and leave Will Wales with the Lord.

"I am so sorry for the man; for his course is in such a shape that it will not answer to be meddled with, for there are difficulties upon difficulties. I would say that the Lord understands the situation, and if Will Wales will seek Him with all his heart, He will be found of him. If he will do his best, God will pardon and receive him.

"Oh, how precious it is to know that we have One who does know and understand, and will help the ones who are most helpless. But the rebuke of God is upon the father and the brother who would drive to destruction and perdition one who stands in the sight of God under no worse condemnation than themselves; and yet they will so use their gifts of speech as to dishearten, discourage, and drive Will Wales to despair.

"Will Wales may hope in God and do the best he can to serve God in all humility of mind, casting his helpless soul upon the great Sin-bearer. I

have not written a word to either father or son. I would gladly do something to help poor Will Wales to make things right, but this cannot be done as matters are now situated, without someone being wronged."--Letter 175, 1901.

(Italics Supplied)

Will Wales settled in the South and according to a letter from G. I. Butler, first president of the newly created Southern Union Conference, through 1902 and 1903 "labored hard." He was granted a ministerial license and led a number of people into the message. Against Butler's judgment, but in response to strong support, he was reordained. For a time he left his wife Myrtle, with whom he often quarreled, and went north. His conduct was such that the Cumberland Conference withdrew his credentials. While canvassing he became involved with one of his new converts who confessed to a relationship involving the violation of the seventh commandment. Elder Butler found it necessary to sound a warning in the columns of The Southern Watchman.

We find no further reference to the Wales case in our files until the year 1911, when on August 15, Elder C. F. McVagh, president of the Southern Union Conference, wrote to Elder W. C. White, setting forth the problem confronting the Alabama Conference in retaining Mr. Wales as the elder of the Birmingham church. We quote his letter as follows:

Nashville, Tennessee  
August 15, 1911

Elder W. C. White  
Sanitarium, California

Dear Brother: In Alabama the conference officers are much perplexed about the case of W. C. Wales and I have been asked to write for a copy of what has been written bearing upon his public labor as a

minister, and also for present advice, or instruction from the Lord. You are acquainted with his past. His life has been straight so far as is known for several years, and he has sold books and Bibles. But he feels a burden to preach and wherever he goes he soon has opportunities to preach. He has wonderful ability and soon there is an interest. He gives outward evidence of deep consecration and people accept the truth under his labors.

A little over a year ago he moved to Birmingham, Alabama, and soon was taking an active part in church work. The church at that time was very much run down. He became elder, and soon had some work started and several families interested. The interest grew and during the winter he held Sunday night meetings in a theater with a large attendance and some accepted the truth. He had the confidence of the church members who were naturally much encouraged; and so as he has had to devote much of his time to taking care of the interest (he is an indefatigable worker) the conference committee voted him \$8 a week to assist him. Of course he cannot live on that, and he thinks the interest demands full time, and he is really looking to the restoration of his credentials and complete recognition as a minister of the Conference. His present experience no one doubts, but the past has marked him and his family.

His wife is a nervous wreck and her confidence has been so shaken that while she wants him to preach, there is constant danger that as he becomes popular and mingles with the people that she will become jealous whether (there) is any cause or not, and herself bring on a scandal by talking and telling of the past which she is prone to do when she becomes suspicious of him. All would be greatly relieved if there is any definite counsel from the Lord. I feel sure that all would accept it, including Brother and Sister Wales.

Personally, I feel very sorry for them both and have confidence that they are trying to live right, and I wish to encourage them in every way that is right. His past is so checkered and so widely known that we fear to advise him to labor in the ministry, but the fact is he is doing it, and the Lord apparently blesses his efforts.

Shall we advise him to quit preaching, or shall the conference accept his labor and pay him for it? If he labors he must be paid and then what about his credentials?

Sincerely,

(Signed) C. F. McVagh

Written at the request of the Alabama Conference Committee

On September 14, Elder White placed his letter in Mrs. White's hands, and on September 15, Elder White conveyed Mrs. White's counsel in the case to Elder McVagh. The letter is as follows:

Sanitarium, California  
Sept. 15, 1911

Elder C. F. McVagh  
Nashville, Tennessee

Dear Brother McVagh: It is two or three weeks since I received your letter of August 15, regarding the perplexity which has arisen in the Alabama Conference over the case of W. C. Wales.

Since our return from Southern California, Mother has been weak and weary, and I did not place this letter in her hands until yesterday. Then she read it all through, and when she recalled the sad experiences through which Brother Wales has passed, she felt very sorry for him and for our brethren whose hearts have been made sad through the past years by his weak and wicked course.

Mother says that those who have dealt with the perplexities arising from his many transgressions in the past, should take the responsibility of advising regarding our present duty toward him. Mother does not wish to take large responsibility in this matter; but she says regarding Elder Wales as she has said regarding other men in a somewhat similar position, if they have thoroughly repented, if they are living such lives as convince their brethren that they are thoroughly in earnest, do not cut them off from fellowship, do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility.

From this I would understand that it would be unwise to renew his credentials and send him from place to place among the people; but if he has by a faithful Christian life won the confidence of the church where he lives, do not stand in the way of his doing such work as that church may be responsible for. In fact, it may be the duty of his brethren to go farther and to pay him for faithful labor. In fact, I do not see how you could withhold from him a proper remuneration for faithful and judicious labor; but this would not be placing before him the same temptation as to give him credentials and send him forth in the conference as a traveling minister.

And I would say, as Mother has said, this is a question which should be submitted to those who have had to deal with his case in the past. Please consider the opinions I have expressed only as suggestive.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) W. C. White  
(Italics Supplied)

Although this letter was written by Elder W. C. White, it is of interest to note that at some later time, a copy of it came into Mrs. White's hands, for we find a copy of it, bearing in her handwriting the following words of endorsement:

This is correct advice in such cases. Let him walk humbly before God. I see no light in giving him responsibilities.

No more was heard of the matter until early in 1913, when a letter addressed to Mrs. White, dated January 8, 1913, was received from the newly elected president of the Alabama Conference. The points in question are set forth in the letter as follows:

Birmingham, Ala.  
January 8, 1913

Mrs. E. G. White  
Sanitarium, California

Dear Sister White: It becomes my painful duty to write to you concerning the case of Brother W. C. Wales. Of his past history and life, it is not necessary to write, as you are sufficiently acquainted with the facts, since his case was brought before you by a letter from Elder C. F. McVagh, dated August 15, 1911. I am sorry it becomes necessary to bring this case before you again.

Elder McVagh's letter was relative to Brother Wales receiving credentials and becoming a conference laborer.

The present difficulty is as to whether or not Brother Wales should be made elder of the Birmingham church, the largest, and now the most influential church in the Conference, as the Conference headquarters are located in Birmingham. The church is disagreed upon the point in question, and it is having a bad influence upon the work in the city and a more or less deleterious effect throughout the Conference. The majority think, because of his capabilities and his late work in the city (as stated in Elder McVagh's letter, a copy of which is herein enclosed), that he should be made elder of the church and act as its pastor, or leader, while others do not favor it because of his life record, and also think that those who have dealt with him in the past should give counsel, and advise as to his becoming elder of the church.

The counsel given by brethren acquainted with him, and by a recent action of the Southern Union Conference Committee, is that he be not made elder of the church.

On December 28, Elder S. E. Wight held a meeting with the church, at which the question was quite freely discussed. Elder Wight dealt very carefully and cautiously with the case and spoke of Brother Wales' good traits and qualifications, but let the church know that neither he nor I could feel free to ordain him because of the advice given by those who know him.

The only point upon which we all could agree was to place his case before the servant of the Lord, and whatever the Lord says, we have all agreed to abide by.

Personally, none of us have aught to say against Brother Wales, but love and fellowship him as a brother in the church and so regard him. The church, with Elder Wight as chairman, asked that I place this matter before you and see what instruction the Lord has for us.

Awaiting an early reply, I am

Sincerely your brother in Christ,

(Signed) A. L. Miller  
1700 North Seventh Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama

P.S. This letter was read to the church, and accepted.

Feeling that his personal appearance before Mrs. White might gain favorable consideration of his case, Mr. Wales went to St. Helena during the second week of January, but Mrs. White did not feel free to have an interview with him. He then placed in writing the circumstances of his case and these were addressed to Mrs. White under date of January 13, 1913. On January 14, Elder Miller's letter of January 8, as well as Mr. Wales' letter of January 13, were placed before Mrs. White, and she made the following statements in connection with their reading:

(Ms 2, 1913)

"I do not think any such letters as that ought to be placed before me. I do not think it is my work to deal with any such things, unless the case has been plainly opened before me. There should be brethren in the church who have wisdom, who can speak

decidedly regarding this case. I cannot understand such things. I do not know this man,\* and I do not believe that God wants me to take any such burden upon me. If they cannot settle such things among themselves by prayer and fasting, then let them continue fasting and prayer till they can.

Such things will arise. It will come,--that is, they will have these difficult questions, and they have got to learn how to treat them. They have got to have an experience. They must bring these things to the Lord, and believe the Lord will hear their prayer, and give them a sound experience in all these things, but they are not to bring them to me.

[Elder W. C. White read portions of Elder McVagh's letter of August 15, 1911, after which Sister White said further:]

The case is such that I have had no particular light in regard to his case, therefore I dare not speak positively in regard to it.

He has to show the evidence that God accepts him and to give that evidence so that our brethren can have something tangible to build upon. Let them say, We will give you a chance. We will see whether God accepts your labors or not.

But it is not wise for me to take the responsibility of this case. I cannot take the least responsibility. Those who see his actions day by day, should know whether he has proved himself, whether God accepts him.

[After reading the letter of W. C. Wales, written January 13, 1913:]

I cannot take responsibility in such matters. The burden of doing so is too great. It might cost me my life. Let those appointed of God to bear the responsibility deal with it in accordance with Christian principles.--Sanitarium, Calif., January 14, 1913

In connection with the question as to what was involved in his statement of September 15, 1911, relative to the holding of responsible positions by those who have passed through such sad experiences, Elder W. C. White, early in 1913, wrote as follows:

\*Note: Ellen White was now 85 years of age and with a memory of this matter evidently somewhat impaired.



Mother says that those who have dealt with the perplexities arising from his many transgressions in the past should take the responsibility of advising regarding our present duty toward him. Mother does not wish to take large responsibility in this matter; but she says regarding Elder Wales, as she has said regarding other men in somewhat similar position, if they have thoroughly repented, if they are living such lives as convince their brethren that they are thoroughly in earnest, do not cut them off from fellowship, do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility.

From this I would understand that it would be unwise to renew his credentials, and send him from place to place among the people; but if he has, by a faithful Christian life, won the confidence of the church where he lives, do not stand in the way of his doing such work as that church may be responsible for. [Quoted from his letter of September 15, 1911, to C. F. McVagh.]

It now appears that there is a question in the minds of the brethren as to what was meant by the words, "do not cut them off from fellowship; do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility."

My understanding of this at the time it was written and my understanding of it today is that the word, "Do not elevate them to positions of responsibility" referred to such responsibility and elevation as was in the minds of the brethren when they asked for a restoration of credentials and complete recognition as a minister of the conference. It did not occur to me that this could apply to the leadership of the church. The question of the leadership was not then under consideration."--W. C. White (Italics Supplied)

William Wales died July 24, 1934. His obituary appeared in the

Review and Herald. It reads:

William C. Wales was born in Melborn, Quebec, September 15, 1856, and passed away at the Washington Sanitarium, Takoma Park, July 24, 1934.

His parents moved to Bordoville, Vt., where they accepted the third angel's message. Shortly thereafter they took up residence in Battle Creek, Michigan. Our brother went to Battle Creek College, and after finishing his course, entered the ministerial work.

He labored in various conferences, among them Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. He served as pastor in the Indianapolis church, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Rockford, Ill. He raised up the Knoxville, (Tenn.) and Birmingham (Ala.) churches.

On August 5, 1892, he married Myrtle Stebbins, who survives. During his last illness he spent much of his time in prayer, and he died with a bright hope of eternal life. His mind was clear to the last.

Elder Wales had resided in Birmingham, Ala., for the last twenty-seven years, his membership being in Birmingham No. 1 church,--  
Review and Herald, Sept 27, 1934

This covers the field of documents on file at the White Estate office relative to the W. C. Wales case. It is possible that further information may in the future come to light from sources outside of the office,--

Arthur L. White,  
"Elmhaven," St. Helena, Calif.  
Amplified and recopied, Dec 10, 1963  
Updated by new material added July 16, 1975

#### ON BREAKING UP A PRESENT UNION

In the Will Wales case Ellen White counseled: "His case cannot be improved by leaving the present wife. It would not better the case to go to the other woman [his first wife] in the question."--2SM p. 341.

She recognized that he could be accepted by God without breaking up the second marriage. #

#### Don't Break Up the Second Marriage\*

Your letter has been received and read. I have had acquaintance with several such cases and have found those who felt conscientious to do something in similar cases to the one you mention. After having stirred things up generally, and torn things to pieces, they had no wisdom to put things together to make matters better. I found that those who were so zealous to tear things down

#Note: See Appendix A for W. C. White letter of February 21, 1927, in which he discusses several cases regarding which Ellen White was familiar.

\*Note: In 1890 in dealing with a case, the circumstances beyond those revealed by E. G. White are unknown to the White Estate staff.

did nothing to build them up in right order. They had the faculty to confuse, distress, and create a most deplorable condition of things, but not the faculty to make them better.

You have asked my counsel in regard to this case; I would say that unless those who are burdened in reference to the matter have carefully studied a better arrangement, and can find places for these where they can be comfortable, they better not carry out their ideas of a separation. I hope to learn that this matter is not pressed and that sympathy will not be withdrawn from the two whose interests have been united.

I write this because I have seen so many cases of the kind, and persons would have great burden till everything was unsettled and uprooted and then their interest and burden went no further. We should individually know that we have a zeal that is according to knowledge. We should not move hastily in such matters, but look on every side of the question; we should move very cautiously and with pitying tenderness, because we do not know all the circumstances which led to this course of action.

I advise that these unfortunate ones be left to God and their own consciences, and that the church shall not treat them as sinners until they have evidence that they are such in the sight of the Holy God. He reads hearts as an open book. He will not judge as man judgeth.--Letter 5, 1891 (Jan 18, 1891, to C. H. Bliss).

#### COUNSELS TO THOSE FACING DIFFICULTIES

##### Separation Better Than Apostasy -- The Marriage Vow Still Binding

Dear Brother: I hoped the change which seemed to take place in your wife at the meeting in Chicago would be lasting, and was grateful to our heavenly Father when I heard her confession, for I thought that a most severe

task was lifted from my shoulders, but the burden is still upon me. I know that she is not changed for the better. . . .However earnestly her husband may endeavor to pursue a straightforward course to serve God, she will be his evil angel, seeking to lead him away from righteousness. . . .She is Satan's agent, seeking to occupy the place where God should be. . . .In this case it is not the woman whom Brother H is dealing with, but a desperate, satanic spirit.

His best course with this child-wife, so over-bearing, so unyielding, and so uncontrollable, is to take her home, and leave her with the mother who has made her what she is. . . .He is under no obligations to keep one by his side who will only torture his soul. . . .Brother H must let Satan rage, and not allow himself to be cut off from religious privileges because his wife desires it. . . .The marriage vow that binds the husband to the wife must remain unbroken.--Letter 34, 1890 (March 23, 1890).

#### APPENDIX A

In a letter answering questions asked by a young minister, W. C. White on February 21, 1927, recounted three cases with which he was well acquainted:

Dear Brother:

You asked if we have any writings of Sr. White relative to Elder F and Prof. G\* which would throw light on the question as to how people should be dealt with who have married after separation from their companion for reasons other than adultery.

Sr. White did not sympathize with those who took the ground that a person who had separated from a companion on other than Scriptural grounds, had married again, that this second marriage must be broken up if they were to be accepted or retained in an SDA church.

\*Note: Unrelated initials have been substituted for names. These initials have been used consistently. F and G in each case stand for the same men as they may be referred to in this statement and in the document "Dealing With Ministers and Workers Who Have Violated the Seventh Commandment,"

Sr. White fully recognized that these people in most cases had sinned, that some had sinned grievously, and that they should not be accepted into fellowship of our churches unless that sin was repented of. Sr. White did not accept the contention that such repentance could not be genuine without breaking the new bond, and making an earnest effort to return to former companions. She recognized the fact that in most instances, a reunion with the parties formerly connected with in marriage would be either impossible or exceedingly unprofitable. She also recognized that the vows entered into in the second marriage called for such as action as was most merciful and kind to the contracting parties.

She sometimes referred to the teaching of Paul, who having reached a certain point in his experience, said, "But I spare you." He knew there were existing conditions that people were living in relations resulting from sin. He also knew that Christ would accept their genuine repentance, and that in many cases, it would make matters worse if existing relations were torn up, to prepare a way for a reunion with the parties who were incompardonable, so Sr. White used to say, "But I spare you."

Sr. White's next oldest sister, Sarah Harmon, was married to C and became the mother of five children. After her death, in pity for his children, he married a woman who had many years been a faithful servant in his household. Shortly after this, the measles visited the vicinity, and she with others had the measles in a severe form. The measles went to her brain, and she became insane, and had to be taken to the asylum. C struggled along for some time, trying to care for his five children, then for their sake, married a very good, efficient woman. She helped him make a home and bring up his children, and was with him in Norfolk Island when he died. At various times, individuals where C lived, undertook to secure his exclusion from the church because he had married without separation from his wife on the charge of adultery. When appealed to in regard to this matter, Sr. White said, "Let them alone."

Regarding G, I can speak quite freely. About 1875 he married a very brilliant schoolteacher. Her mother was a very devoted woman; her father was a great hypocrite. She was very talented, but after a number of years she became quarrelsome and made his life miserable. At that time he was associated with a very brilliant young woman who was an accountant at \_\_\_\_\_ College, and formed a fondness for her. Sr. White wrote him a very plain warning, which he promised to heed. Shortly after Sr. White had gone to Europe, Bro. G resigned his position at \_\_\_\_\_ College, went to Michigan to visit his sister, and offered no obstruction to his wife in getting a divorce.

Thus far, whose who knew the case approved, but shortly after this he married the bookkeeper before mentioned; then all his friends were

greatly grieved. He taught awhile at \_\_\_\_\_, then settled near \_\_\_\_\_, and for many years worked very hard, his wife helping him to make a living on a little fruit and vegetable farm. They came to see the wickedness of the course they had taken. They repented of it very bitterly, and their brethren and sisters were satisfied that their repentance was genuine. They had three beautiful children, growing up, and no one as far as I know encouraged them to separate. When the matter was put before Sr. White, she did not encourage a separation, nor could she encourage any movement to exclude him of participation in the work of the third angel's message. [In his later life he labored in a humble way in self-supporting work in the South.]

If persons living in the light of the third angel's message purpose to leave one companion for the sake of uniting with someone else, it is our duty to warn and reprove and discipline.

If persons before embracing the message have entangled themselves, and afterward have repented, confessed their sins, received forgiveness of God, and won the confidence of their brethren, it is better for both ministers and laymen to leave them alone, enjoying the forgiveness and justification which have been wrought through Christ, without undertaking to tear up existing relations. (Italics Supplied)

In answering questions similar to those which called forth his letter of February 21, 1927, W. C. White wrote:

It has been my belief for a long time that our brethren make a serious mistake in their efforts to break up families by arguing that in the fulfillment of their vows made unwisely in most cases, that they are continually day by day committing adultery.--W.C. White Letter, Jan. 6, 1931.

White Estate  
Washington, D. C.  
August 25, 1975