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"Don't Judge Me!"

The Gospel of Tolerance Vs. Church Discipline

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Is the church judgmental? Should it refuse to discipline so as not to judge?

The gospel of tolerance is a worldly attempt to win souls and keep them in the church. Those who believe in this designer gospel maintain that more people will join the church and stay in it if, instead of "judging people," we simply "accept them the way they are." This gospel is preached loudest when an offending member comes up for church discipline.

The scriptural basis for this new gospel is Christ's statement in His Sermon on the Mount, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt 7:1). Those who have embraced the gospel of tolerance insist that it is wrong for the church to discipline anyone. Since only an infallible God can truly judge anyone, proponents of the new gospel say that those who insist on disciplining a fellow believer are hypocrites or "Pharisees," for they also are sinners just like the one they are judging.

Seventh-day Adventists who find this gospel of tolerance attractive dress it up in the words of Ellen G. White. They find support in Mrs. White's comment on the Sermon on the Mount: "Christ here gives no liberty for any man to pass judgment upon others. In the Sermon on the Mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God" (Gospel Workers, p. 502). They also quote Ellen White's statement concerning Christ's parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13): "Not judgment and condemnation of others, but humility and distrust of self, is the teaching of Christ's parable" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 74).

In this article we will examine the gospel of tolerance, arguing that it is inconsistent, self-refuting and unbiblical, and we will look more closely at Matthew 7:1 and Ellen G. White's statements that are often cited in support of this questionable doctrine.

THE GOSPEL OF TOLERANCE

The gospel of tolerance argues that many people have stopped coming to church mainly because members are too judgmental. To be redemptive, the church must be tolerant. Tolerance is equated with open-mindedness, and the person who stands up for biblical teaching and practices is seen as a bigot. So, even if a person is on the wrong road we should leave him alone. The church must not discipline him.

There is some truth, of course, in the observation that church members are often hypocritical and too hasty in judging their fellow brothers and sisters when they sin. But advocates of this view seriously err when they claim that it is wrong to judge people who are at fault. Those who propagate and believe this gospel of tolerance do so for two main reasons. First, they confuse it
While the church must show respect to all, it must also declare that there are some views that are erroneous and some practices that are not morally acceptable.

1. Confusing Tolerance with Respect

My dictionary defines tolerance as a "fair and permissive attitude toward those whose race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one’s own." Genuine tolerance requires that we allow the person who espouses beliefs we consider wrong the right to do so. Accordingly, a tolerant person is one who is courteous and understanding. He is not prejudiced against other people or their creeds and beliefs. Neither does he intrude or impose his views upon others. Tolerance, in this context, means freedom from bigotry and dogmatic viewpoints.

This meaning of tolerance (known as "civic tolerance") can be equated with respect. It is one of the virtues enshrined in the laws and constitutions of civilized and democratic societies. We respect people who hold beliefs different from our own. We treat them courteously and allow them to express their views in public discourse, even though we may strongly disagree with them and vigorously contend against their ideas in the public square.

But while people have a right to hold and express their views, respect or civility should not be confused with the gospel of tolerance. There is a huge difference. Whereas civic tolerance maintains that all persons should be respected and their views should get a courteous hearing, the gospel of tolerance goes further by arguing that all views and practices have equal worth, merit, or truth. Tolerating or respecting people (civic tolerance) is confused with tolerating their ideas and practices (gospel of tolerance). According to this gospel, no idea or behavior can be opposed, regardless of how graciously, without inviting the charge of being "judgmental," "intolerant," "disrespectful," "bigoted," "extremist," or some other harsh accusation.

What is preached today by the gospel of tolerance is not tolerance at all but an ideology of pluralism in belief systems, relativism (anything goes) in ethics, and permissiveness in behavior. Many people do not realize that the notion that all viewpoints and practices have equal worth is not only false, but frankly nonsense.

Common sense tells us that some views are patently false and some practices are plainly wrong. No civil society however open-minded it claims to be can tolerate all kinds of ideas and behaviors. If it did, there would be no need for law courts and the police to arbitrate among contending claims. There exist in every society some core beliefs and values that are non-negotiable. Anarchy results when a society cannot make judgments about right and wrong.

What is true of society also holds true in the church. No Christian church can legitimately allow permissiveness in its members behavior or pluralism in their beliefs. While the church must show respect to all persons, the church must also declare that there are some views that are erroneous and some practices that are not morally acceptable. Church discipline is the means the church employs to ensure that members may not believe or do just anything they want. Otherwise what would be the need for the church?
So the gospel of tolerance is misguided, if not heretical, when it confuses respect for people with tolerance of their ideas and behavior.

2. Misunderstanding the Meaning of Tolerance

The second reason why the gospel of tolerance is very popular is that few understand the true nature of tolerance. Today, if we think someone's beliefs or behavior is wrong, we are considered intolerant, bigoted, or narrow-minded. Contrary moral opinions are labeled as "imposing your views on others." The problem is that many of those who throw around the charges of intolerance do not fully understand some important ideas that are inherent in the concept of tolerance.

According to Websters New World Dictionary (2nd College Edition), tolerance means to allow or to permit, to recognize and respect others beliefs and practices without sharing them, to bear or put up with someone or something not necessarily liked. Note the following ideas that are implied in the meaning of tolerance.

1. Tolerance is not pluralism. The gospel of tolerance takes the clearly-observable fact that there is a plurality of views, values, and practices in society and draws the illegitimate conclusion that all viewpoints should be accorded the same worth or that there is no justifiable way of choosing among them. It makes a leap in logic when it argues from what exists or what is (plurality of views) to what ought to be (pluralism in beliefs and ethics). On this mistaken view anyone who attempts to show that there is a right and a wrong way is considered "dogmatic" or "intolerant."

But while genuine tolerance admits that there are many competing claims in belief and lifestyle, no one ever tolerates everything. Observe the reaction of preachers of the gospel of tolerance when someone steals their most valuable possessions! We all make value judgments as to the rightness and wrongness of certain ideas and behaviors whether they be stealing, killing (war, abortion, capital punishment), racism, homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, or pornography. Given that everyone maintains that some things should or should not be tolerated, the real issue is not whether one is tolerant, but rather what is included on one's list and why.

2. Tolerance implies disagreement. Today all we have to do to be considered intolerant is to disagree with someone, especially on certain hot-button issues. When that happens, the gospel of tolerance labels the expression of contrary opinions as "imposing your views on others." Those who differ in certain ways are deemed bigoted and narrow-minded.

The truth, however, is that we cannot tolerate others unless we disagree with them. We dont "tolerate" people who share our views. We do not tolerate something we either accept or are indifferent to, because it requires nothing of us. Instead, tolerance is reserved for those we think are wrong.

Unfortunately, this essential element of tolerated disagreement is often lost in today's discussion about tolerance. Most preachers of the "dont judge me" gospel of tolerance, for instance, cannot rightfully be said to be tolerant regarding homosexual behavior since they have no objection to it. By definition, tolerance implies disagreement or dislike.

3. Tolerance implies intolerance. One often-overlooked paradox within the concept of tolerance is that at the core of tolerance is a kind of intolerance. Since tolerance requires a disagreement and an initial objection, it follows that the least tolerant person is the person who accepts everything, because such a person is not required to overcome any internal objections.

Consequently, we must not be intimidated by the label of "intolerant." The most intolerant person is the one who has no, or very few, convictions on anything. Ironically, the Bible-believing Christian (the one holding to "dogmatic" beliefs) may be much more tolerant than her counterpart, because there are so many more things to which she objects.

4. Tolerance is not impotence or coercion.
Much of what masquerades as tolerance today is not genuine tolerance at all but actually cowardice—the fear of being unpopular in the eyes of our relativistic culture.

In the context of church discipline, many so-called tolerant churches which fail to discipline erring members betray their impotence or lack of backbone. Genuine tolerance always implies a restraint in the judicious exercise of legitimate power. For God has invested the church with power to discipline (Mt 18:15-18). "On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead. It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting its prosperity, purity, and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their un-Christlike conduct would bring dishonor on the truth. Whatever the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God's word will be ratified in heaven" (Gospel Workers, p. 501).

Therefore, a genuinely tolerant church must not fail to exercise its God-given authority to discipline erring members. Such an exercise can have a healing or redemptive impact on the lives of those members. "The Lord desires His followers to exercise great care in dealing with one another. They are to lift up, to restore, to heal. But there is to be in the church no neglect of proper discipline" (Testimonies for the Church, 7:264).

While tolerance is not impotent—the failure to exercise power judiciously—neither is it the abuse of power. If we exercise our power by imposing our views (whether right or wrong) upon others, it is not only intolerance, but coercion.

Ironically, impotent churches—those that tolerate all kinds of questionable beliefs and practices—also tend to be the most intolerant toward faithful members who seek to uphold biblical teachings and lifestyles. Though they claim to be open-minded, they do not always welcome opposing views that are biblical. Perhaps I should add parenthetically that this is why it has become risky these days for anyone to question the biblical legitimacy of the ideologies that are invading such churches—things such as higher criticism, homosexuality, unbiblical divorce and remarriage, women's ordination, rock music, questionable worship styles, etc. Those who courageously stand up against these practices are often vilified, if not persecuted. And sometimes it is very difficult for loyal Adventists to be hired or retained in church employ, despite the fact that they may be the most qualified. The policy is usually unwritten, but those familiar with several situations can testify to the intolerant attitude toward those who uphold the longstanding biblical position on the ideological issues.

Genuine tolerance, in contrast to the gospel of tolerance, is neither impotent nor coercive. It always implies a restraint in the judicious exercise of legitimate power. In the church, genuine tolerance is manifested when it tolerates all persons in all circumstances by according them respect and courtesy. But it tolerates (allows) only beliefs and behaviors that are biblically acceptable.

5. Tolerance is not indifference or passivity. We must distinguish between genuine tolerance and the moral passivity or indifference that is inherent in the gospel of tolerance. Too much of what goes by the name tolerance is not the result of principled judgment; it is simple moral indifference. We just don't care about others what they believe and how they behave.

Any society or group that is indifferent to truth is morally bankrupt, for it is unwilling or unable to discern right from wrong. Any church that stoops to this level of indifference will...
inevitably invite God's judgment upon its members. "God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they become responsible for these sins" (Testimonies for the Church, 3:269).

This is why Seventh-day Adventists ought to take church discipline very seriously. Unfortunately, those who have embraced the gospel of tolerance believe neither in church discipline nor in the reasons for it.

**REASONS FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

The *Church Manual* says:

"Among the grievous sins for which members shall be subject to church discipline are the following:

1. Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church or teaching doctrines contrary to the same.

2. Violation of the law of God, such as worship of idols, murder, stealing, profanity, gambling, Sabbath-breaking, and willful and habitual falsehood.

3. Violation of the seventh commandment of the law of God as it relates to the marriage institution, the Christian home, and biblical standards of moral conduct.

4. Such violations as fornication, promiscuity, incest, homosexual practice, sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults, and other sexual perversions, and the remarriage of a divorced person, except of the spouse who has remained faithful to the marriage vow in a divorce for adultery or for sexual perversions.

5. Physical violence, including violence within the family.

6. Fraud or willful misrepresentation in business.

7. Disorderly conduct which brings reproach upon the cause.

8. Adhering to or taking part in a divisive or disloyal movement or organization. (See p. 180.)

9. Persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church.

10. The use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages.

11. The use, manufacture, or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption.

12. The misuse of, or trafficking in, narcotics or other drugs.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes the need of exercising great care to protect the highest spiritual interests of its members, to ensure fair treatment, and to safeguard the name of the church.

"In a case of transgression of the commandments of God where there is deep repentance and full and free confession, giving evidence that genuine conversion has taken place, the church may administer discipline by placing the transgressor under censure for a stated period of time.
"However, in a case of flagrant violations of the law of God which have brought public reproach upon the cause, the church may deem it necessary, even though a sincere confession has been made, to remove an individual from church membership to protect its name and its Christian standards. Later, when it is evident that the individual's life is consistent with church standards, the offender may be received back into the fold after rebaptism. The church cannot afford to deal lightly with such sins nor permit personal considerations to affect its actions. It must register its decisive and emphatic disapproval of the sins of fornication, adultery, all acts of moral indiscretion, and other grievous sins; at the same time it must do everything to restore and reclaim the erring ones. As the world continually grows more lax in moral matters, the church must not lower the standards set by God" (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2000 edition*, pp. 184, 185).

Unfortunately, whenever the subject of church discipline comes up, believers in the gospel of tolerance bring up their doctrine of "dont judge me." But the gospel of tolerance is seriously flawed, and the "dont judge me" doctrine upon which it is based is equally questionable, as we shall attempt to show.

**THE "DONT JUDGE ME" DOCTRINE**

Christ's statement, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt 7:1) is perhaps the second most popular verse in the Bible, next only to Christ's command to "love one another." We have all had this "judge not" or "dont judge me" line quoted to us at one time or another. Even those who do not go to church have memorized it, employing it to their service when they seek to turn the tables on Christians.

This proof text of the "dont judge me" doctrine is so powerful that even when we are compelled to speak words of rebuke or criticism, we preface our comments by saying, "Well, I know were not supposed to judge, but . . . ." And when we insist on judging the views and behavior of others we are met with the comment, "Who are you to judge?"

Few people are aware, however, that comments such as "Dont judge me," or "Who are you to judge?" are rooted in an ethical system known as relativism. Relativism does not believe in objective, universal, moral absolutes, claiming that there are no standards of right and wrong. According to this system, morality is subjective; it changes from person to person, place to place, and time to time. Since there are no moral standards, all must be left to live as they see fit. In the popular expression of today, we must "live and let live." We must be open to other beliefs, other moral convictions and different lifestyles.

Since relativism teaches that there are no moral absolutes, it argues that we cannot justifiably make moral judgments or evaluate actions and beliefs as morally right or wrong. On this view, anyone who attempts to show that there is a right and wrong way is considered "dogmatic" or "intolerant." However, this relativistic doctrine of "dont judge me" is inconsistent, self-refuting, and unbiblical. It makes sense only if there are some objective moral absolutes.

1. **Inconsistent and Self-Refuting**

Ill illustrate the inconsistency and absurdity of the dont judge me philosophy by a conversation I had with a friend Ill call Mary. She prided herself as a progressive and tolerant Adventist scholar until we started discussing the question of homosexuality.

"I have no problem with you when you express and defend your view on homosexuality," she said. "But its very wrong to be judgmental."

"Whats wrong with that?" I asked this leading question in order to show the self-refuting nature of her relativistic ethic.

"Its not right to judge other people; only God can do that," she said.

And I said, "If its wrong to judge people, Mary, why are you judging me? Are you God?"
The question caught her totally off guard. It exposed the inconsistency in the "dont judge me" philosophy. On the one hand, it denies all moral absolutes; on the other hand it wants to proclaim its own absolutes and force them on me.

The statement "Its not right to judge other people" is itself a moral judgment—the same kind of judgment that my friend was denying to me. My response halted her for a moment. When she regained her composure, she tried another approach.

"Perhaps I didn't express myself well enough," she said. "Its okay to judge people as long as you dont push your morality on them."

"Is that your morality, Mary?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you forcing your morality on me?" I countered.

Once again, my friend found herself struggling with the inconsistency of her relativistic doctrine. In one last exasperated effort she said, "Listen, Sam, I cannot express it well enough, but Im sure you know what I mean."

"No, Mary, I dont know what you mean. You cannot express it well because your relativistic ethic does not make sense. It is self-contradictory and self-defeating. You challenged the legitimacy of my making a moral judgment about homosexuality, but your attempt itself implies a moral judgment the very thing you are fighting against. The truth is, there are moral absolutes—universal principles of right and wrong by which we can make judgments. But you are a relativist, so you cant even say my judgments are wrong."

I cite this dialogue to show that the "dont judge me" doctrine and the relativistic philosophy it is built on make no logical sense. When people say, "Dont judge me," ask them, "Why not?" You will discover that they cannot give a meaningful reason, because the doctrine is inconsistent and self-refuting. It is also unbiblical.

2. A Biblically Questionable Doctrine

Though Jesus statement in Matthew 7:1 is the key text for the "dont judge me" gospel of tolerance, the passage does not teach that it is wrong to judge.

First of all, when Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," the original word which is here rendered "judge" is krino. The word is used in a variety of senses in the New Testament. The word may mean:

a. To weigh carefully and form an opinion as in "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say" (1 Cor 10:15), and in "judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?" (1 Cor 11:13).

b. To draw a conclusion such as in "thou [Simon, whom Christ asked, "Which of them will love Him most?"] hast rightly judged" (Lk 7:43).

c. To regard or account someone in a certain way; e.g., "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord" (Acts 16:15), that is, "If you regard or account me so."

d. To put on trial before a court as in "Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law" (Jn 18:31).
e. To condemn. e.g., "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him?" (Jn 7:51).

f. To despise as in "Let not him that eateth despise him...; and let not him which eateth not judge him" (Rom 14:3).

The above examples show that the basic meaning of *krino* is to pass judgment. The context of the words usage, though, determines its exact meaning and the rightness and wrongness of passing judgment. For example, when Jesus said in John 7:24, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment," the context tells us how to judge—namely, not according to appearance, but righteously.

Also Paul's statement in Romans 14:3, 4, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" suggests that he was condemning a presumptuous kind of judging—passing judgment on the motives of another, which are open only to God.

So to determine what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," it is important to look at the context in which the passage is found. In this case, it is the following five verses, Matthew 7:1-5:

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.
2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.
3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?
5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Observe that verse 1 is inseparably connected with the next four verses. The opening word in verse 2 ("for") indicates that the contents of verse 2 are a continuation of the theme of judging in verse 1, while the "and" at the beginning of verse 3 and the "or" at the beginning of verse 4 denote the same thing. Verse 5 is the Lord's application of the whole. Another link joining the five verses is the threefold mention of "thy brother" in verses 3, 4 and 5. Here the Lord describes the condition of "thy brother" and the state of the one who is trying to judge him ("thou").

Matthew 7:1-5 reveals the following facts regarding the meaning of Christ's "judge not" statement:

1. Jesus is not putting an end to the making of judgments; He is speaking against judging others *hypocritically*. The humorous word picture of a person with a beam in his eye trying to remove a speck from another person's eye is intended to illustrate this point. Our Lord is teaching that when we have major problems in our own lives, we have no business arrogantly criticizing those whose problems are vastly less serious.

2. Jesus is not saying that we must never judge people; instead we must judge them after we have examined ourselves. Notice verse 5: "Thou hypocrite, *first* cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and *then* shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Once we have taken care of the plank in our own eyes, then and only then can we attend to the sawdust in someone else's eye. This caution is intended to slow us in our haste to pass judgment. The accusers of the woman caught in adultery aptly illustrate this point (John 8:1-11).

3. Jesus is not saying we must not make judgments at all because we are sinners; rather we must do so especially when the condition of others is more serious than our own. Observe that
Christ doesn’t say if we have sawdust in our eyes we have no business helping the person with a plank in his eye. If our problem is only sawdust, by all means we must assist those whom we judge to have larger problems!

3. The True Meaning of "Judge Not"

As it turns out, Matthew 7:1, the key text for the "dont judge me" gospel of tolerance, does not say that all judging must cease. It is not saying that there should be no judgments within the church when matters come up for church discipline. We do, and should, judge when a brother or sister err in embracing beliefs and lifestyle patterns that are incompatible with God’s kingdom. The thrust of Jesus’ counsel is that when we make such judgments, we must be very careful how we do it.

Jesus, after all, indicates that we are to judge. Whether the problem is a plank or some sawdust, we must help our brothers and sisters in difficulties. But we must do so in a proper way. Our Lord is warning against our hypocrisy in quickly detecting the minor faults of others while unconcerned about our own graver sins. Christ is saying that if we judge others in this hypocritical manner we shall be judged by a God who sees what we do in secret.

Paul made the same point: "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom 2:1). Anyone who censures in others that which he allows in himself is inexcusable and self-condemned. Nathan brought the same message to David in 2 Samuel 12:1-11.

In effect, Christ’s Sermon on the Mount teaches humility and forbearance in our relationship with all who err. He taught the same lesson in the parable of the wheat and tares.

FORBEARANCE, NOT THE GOSPEL OF TOLERANCE

Contrary to the claims of the gospel of tolerance, Christ’s "wheat and tares" parable in Matthew 13:24-30 does not justify the relativistic doctrine of "dont judge me." His statement in verse 30, "Let both grow together until the harvest" does not prop up the claim that the church has no right to judge anyone or to condemn their wrong beliefs and misconduct. Instead, the parable calls for extreme caution whenever we attempt to discipline people lest in our haste we make serious mistakes.

1. Don’t judge motives. We must be careful not to judge the character and motives of people. We do well not to arrogate to ourselves what God alone can do—reading the heart and motives of people. In Christ’s Object Lessons Ellen White cautions,

"Christ’s servants are grieved as they see true and false believers mingled in the church. They long to do something to cleanse the church. Like the servants of the householder, they are ready to uproot the tares. But Christ says to them, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

"Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church, but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive. He knows our nature too well to entrust this work to us. Should we try to uproot from the church those whom we suppose to be spurious Christians, we should be sure to make mistakes. Often we regard as hopeless subjects the very ones whom Christ is drawing to Himself. Were we to deal with these souls according to our imperfect judgment, it would perhaps extinguish their last hope. Many who think themselves Christians will at last be found wanting. Many will be in heaven who their neighbors supposed would never enter there. Man judges from appearance, but God judges the heart. The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest; and
the harvest is the end of probationary time" (Christs Object Lessons, pp. 71, 72).

Note that according to Mrs. White, "Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church." In order to do so we need to know how to make sound judgments with spiritual discernment. The Scriptures repeatedly urge us to discern between good and evil (Heb 5:14). Malachi 3:18 calls upon us to discern between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. Ezekiel 44:23 tells us that we are to teach people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. The apostle John calls upon us to discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 Jn 4:6). And Paul commands us to uphold the truth and reject lies (Rom 1:25), for no lie is of the truth (1 Jn 2:21).

But contrary to the overwhelming testimony of Scripture, the "dont judge me" gospel of tolerance teaches us not to draw lines between right and wrong ideas and practices. It bids us not to discriminate or attempt to evaluate the worth of different beliefs and lifestyles. Yet how can we be saved if we do not discern between good and evil, right and wrong? Failure to exercise this power of judgment may not only be spiritually fatal for us but could cause others to be lost as well. This is why Scripture tells us to examine everything carefully and to hold fast that which is good, abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thess 5:21-22).

Thus, like Jesus statement in the Sermon on the Mount, this parable about the wheat and tares is not saying we must not judge at all. Rather, we must exercise great care whenever we attempt to discipline people. The parable urges us to know the limits of our human abilities of discernment. We cannot know the heart and motives of others. These fall within Gods domain. God alone can judge character and motives. We must be careful.

2. Be Forbearing. Christs Object Lessons brings out another important lesson in this parablethe lesson of forbearance or patience in dealing with erring ones: "There is in the Saviours words another lesson, a lesson of wonderful forbearance and tender love. As the tares have their roots closely intertwined with those of the good grain, so false brethren in the church may be closely linked with true disciples. The real character of these pretended believers is not fully manifested. Were they to be separated from the church, others might be caused to stumble, who but for this would have remained steadfast" (p. 72).

It is only in this context of forbearance that Mrs. White urges us not to condemn or judge others. "The Redeemer does not want to lose one soul; His experience with Judas is recorded to show His long patience with perverse human nature; and He bids us bear with it as He has borne. He has said that false brethren will be found in the church till the close of time. Notwithstanding Christs warning, men have sought to uproot the tares. . . . Not judgment and condemnation of others, but humility and distrust of self, is the teaching of Christs parable" (ibid., pp. 73, 74).

CONCLUSION

We cannot claim to know the motives of those who have embraced the gospel of tolerance and its relativistic doctrine of "dont judge me." But this much is certain: Both the Bible and Ellen White make it abundantly clear that the church has a duty to judge erroneous beliefs and practices. The issue is not about not judging anyone. It is about the extreme caution we must exercise when we judge or discipline erring ones. The following statement from Mrs. White captures what our attitude must be when we are called upon to exercise this divine obligation:

"In dealing with the erring, harsh measures should not be resorted to; milder means will effect far more. Make use of the milder means most perseveringly, and even if they do not succeed, wait patiently; never hurry the matter of cutting off a member from the church. Pray for him, and see if God will not move upon the heart of the erring. Discipline has been largely
perverted. Those who have had very defective characters themselves have been very forward in disciplining others, and thus all discipline has been brought into contempt. Passion, prejudice, and partiality, I am sorry to say, have had abundant room for exhibition, and proper discipline has been strangely neglected. If those who deal with the erring had hearts full of the milk of human kindness, what a different spirit would prevail in our churches. May the Lord open the eyes and soften the hearts of those who have a harsh, unforgiving, unrelenting spirit toward those whom they think in error. Such men dishonor their office and dishonor God. They grieve the hearts of His children, and compel them to cry unto God in their distress. The Lord will surely hear their cry, and will judge for these things" (Review and Herald, May 14, 1895).

A pastor grapples with a sensitive topic and offers helpful information.

One of the most difficult jobs a pastor has is in disciplining a member of the church. Most pastors do not want to deal with all the challenges that go with discipline. For the most part, I have found that church discipline is a disagreeable but necessary part of ministry. "Paul charged Timothy to preach the word, but there was another part to be done—reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. This work cannot be neglected with safety. . . . Watch in all things, watch for the devices of Satan, lest you be beguiled from doing the disagreeable part of the work" (Review and Herald, Sept. 28, 1897).

Part of the calling to ministry is to deal with discipline in the church. Many members have been deceived into believing that grace means forgiveness that has no moral conditions attached. The history of ancient Israel shows that God sometimes employs radical disciplinary measures to bring His people back into relationship with Him. Over the years of my ministry, I have seen many members come back to the church stronger after being disciplined and begin contributing to the life of the church after a new commitment. In my experience, most of these that come back do so after the other pastor moves on. It offers them the opportunity to reconnect with the church and have a new start with a new pastor. I have held Bible studies with former members and have had success with them. A visit with former members helps to determine the spiritual condition of the former member, and the invitation to come back can be well received.

Why should this be a concern for a pastor? First and foremost, it is biblical counsel. Matthew 18 gives us instruction and Paul provides New Testament examples of discipline (e.g., 1 Cor 5:1-5; 2 Cor 7:8-12, 13:2-4, 10; Gal 6:1; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 2:5; 9-13, etc.). Ellen G. White wrote that "in dealing with erring church members, Gods people are carefully to follow the instruction given by the Saviour in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew" (Testimonies for the Church, 7:260). We are told to correct members in the way outlined in the Word of God with the goal of reconciliation. We are counseled to go to the erring one calmly and quietly with Christ's love and sympathy to remove the difficulty (ibid., p. 261). "He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

A frequent cause for misunderstanding and problems relating to disfellowshipping delinquent members is a lack of communication. Following Matthew 18 is the start, but I have found that to follow up takes work and letters to the member. Many times they understand the process and will avoid contact. Letters allow you to keep the process going. "Ministers of the gospel sometimes do great harm by allowing their forbearance toward the erring to degenerate into toleration of sins and even participation in them. Thus they are led to excuse and palliate that which God condemns, and after a time they become so blinded as to commend the very ones

"Too many ministers neglect to deal faithfully with those with whom they come in contact. They leave plain dealing to be done by other ministers: for they do not want to run the risk of losing the friendship of those for whom they labor. If ministers would deal at the right time with those who err, they would prevent an accumulation of wrong, and save souls from death. If the work of reproving is neglected by one minister, and taken up by another, those who are reproved receive the impression that the minister who did not point out their errors was a good minister. But this is not the case; he was merely a preacher, not a worker together with God for the suppression of sin" (*Review and Herald*, Sept. 28, 1897).

In one church, three pastors were dropped from the ministry as a result of the church's not taking disciplinary action towards some women in the church. The same women caused these pastors to lose their way. How many pastors have fallen due to the lack of church discipline of members? Another church experienced repeated divorce and remarriage between members. It all started when the church did not discipline two couples in the church. A pastor who had moved 18 years before received a note from a member of that church, saying, "We have not dropped a name since you last pastored this church."

Is discipline important to the life of the church? Yes! Throughout the Scriptures God appeals to His people for a commitment to godly living. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:1, 2 RSV).

Members of God's church are to exercise great care in dealing with one another. They are to build up, restore, and seek to heal. But there is to be no neglect in the church of proper discipline. "God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they become responsible for these sins" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 3:269).

As a pastor, I have to regard myself as a pupil and my members as pupils in a school learning how to deal with the erring. With much prayer and seeking counsel from the Lord with each case, we can be faithful and redemptive. But on the other hand, "if the sins of the people are passed over by those in responsible positions, His frown will be upon them, and the people of God, as a body, will be held responsible for those sins. In His dealings with His people in the past the Lord shows the necessity of purifying the church from wrongs. . . . If wrongs are apparent among His people, and if the servants of God pass on indifferent to them, they virtually sustain and justify the sinner, and are alike guilty and will just as surely receive the displeasure of God; for they will be made responsible for the sins of the guilty" (ibid., pp. 265, 266).

"If one neglects the duty Christ has enjoined, of trying to restore those who are in error and sin, he becomes a partaker in the sin. For evils that we might have checked, we are just as responsible as if we were guilty of the acts ourselves" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 441).

This is a call for God's pastors to be faithful and to go about prayerfully preparing His people for the coming of the Lord. It will help to counteract the world's disregard for sin. Even some who have taken an oath to uphold the Word of God have allowed sin to enter in the pulpit. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheeps clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:15-20, RSV). We want to save our members from the fire. We are agents for change to help our members to understand the condition they are in.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns
another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin."

Church discipline is a solemn work that a shepherd must participate in for the sake of the whole church and for the sake of God's kingdom. The servant of the Lord once observed that not one in twenty were ready for the coming of Jesus. Are we so sure that things are better today? If we were to do our work of discipline, it could make a difference for some between being saved and being lost. May the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:21).

**Should We Drop Members?**

In light of this counsel, should we ever drop anyone from the membership of the church? I believe the answer is yes, but the process is challenging. If the church's mission is to reveal the character of God before the world, then every Christian believer is a witness to the characteristics of God. How the world views our Creator will depend, to a large degree, on our witness or exhibit of Him through our lives. It only stands to reason that the world cannot be expected to believe what the church preaches unless the world can see that the message has truly made a difference in the lives of its members.

Philippians 2:15 says, "That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." Jesus established His church in the community to love those caught up in strife, hatred, covetousness, and blasphemy, to demonstrate that Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements into true fellowship. As Christians, we are called to be a community that values unity, cherishes a spirit of forgiveness, and manifests unconditional love. Through His church Christ is seeking to mold us into a fellowship that projects His image before the world.

Ellen White wrote, "God would have His people disciplined and brought into harmony of action, that they may see eye to eye and be of the same mind and of the same judgment. In order to bring about this state of things, there is much to be done. The carnal heart must be subdued and transformed" (**Testimonies for the Church**, 3:360).

Titus 3:9-11 urges, "But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned."

To follow this instruction, one church developed a yearly covenant for the believer in letter form, asking each church member to renew a specific commitment to membership each year. This gives an opportunity for follow-up with those who do not renew on their own. In some cases, problems can be identified and addressed, leading to restored fellowship. In others, the persons membership may ultimately be dropped. In either event, the church must be faithful to its calling, and it will be stronger for having done so.*

Members sometimes move away and do not transfer their membership. The home church does not know if they are faithful, inactive, or completely uninterested. One or more letters may be helpful in encouraging transfers and identifying those who are now members in name only, bringing their inactive state to resolution.*

Here is a sample letter for inactive members who may still be within the reach of the local church. It is a first step toward possible further contact. Usually it would come from the pastor on church letterhead.

*Editors Note: See sample letters on our website.
How the "hard knocks" a young dean received made a difference in her life.

My first position after graduating from college in 1940 was as dean of girls in an Adventist academy. There were regulations outlining what was expected of students, and it was the responsibility of the deans to see that the regulations were respected and honored. My twenty-third birthday had just passed and I was serious about my responsibilities. I wanted to do good work and be proud of the behavior of "my girls."

The rising bell began the days movement in the dormitories. Morning worship followed, then breakfast and classes. Each day, when the students were in their first period classes, I went through the dorm and checked every room for order and cleanliness. Students were rewarded by the room check cards which I left in their rooms: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. If a bed was not made the room always received a "Poor," but after the first room check of the year, most rooms were either excellent or good.

There was a work program in the afternoon. After supper the deans conducted evening worships in their dorms, then study period followed. Bedtime was filled with activity and the lights went out at 10:00 p.m. It was my practice to pass by each room every evening to chat a bit and find out how the day had gone for the students, wishing them each a good night. I was energetic and active with the girls. I wanted them all to do well and also to conform to the school regulations.

Not Perfect. It did not take long to find out that not all the girls were perfect yet. For example, at the first morning room check, I found one sleepy-headed girl still sound asleep. After arousing her, I asked if she were ill. "No," she said, she just could not wake up alone. Her mother always had to come and awaken her in the morning.

"You are always going to have to get up every day of your life," I said. "Wouldn't you like to be able to do it by yourself?" She agreed and I assured her I could teach her. "How long does it take you to get ready for the day?" I asked, and she told me. Then I explained the procedure. I would come to her room with the master key, knock on her door, and if I got no response, I would unlock the door and walk in. I would call her by name. If no answer, I would get a wash cloth with cold water and wash her face. If that was not enough, I would douse her until she was awake. She agreed to the procedure and I left.

The next morning I was at her door at the appointed time, knocked, and was invited in by her roommate who was already getting up. But Alice was sound asleep. I called her by name but got no response. So I continued with the promised procedure. She squirmed and protested a bit. I asked if she was ready to get up and she agreed. I said, "Good, Ill be back tomorrow morning at the same time." In three or four days she was up dressing herself when I arrived at her room. I congratulated her on her improvement and said, "If you need help again let me..."
know." She had conquered her first big problem.

Dress regulations called for the skirts to reach the middle of the knee. As the year progressed skirts crept up. Sometimes it was because the girls were growing taller but at times the skirts were being rolled up around the waist. I was conscientious about the regulations and my responsibilities. This became a continual problem. But I loved my girls and was happy with my work.

**Tricks.** Of course, girls played their little tricks. One Sunday morning the trash barrel came rolling down from the third floor and landed right in the middle of the first floor parlor, spilling its contents along the way.

Saturday night after the evening program, it was my custom to stand by the front door as the girls entered from the evening program. When they were all in, I locked the door. One night at room check I noticed several girls were missing from their rooms on first floor. Then second floor had a lot of girls missing. I wondered where they could be. I knew they were in the dorm and there was no way they could have gotten out, as the door to the basement dining room had been locked after supper. The only place they could be was in the dark attic.

There were two rooms on third floor, one on each side of the attic. These were large rooms with four girls in each. There were small crawl spaces from the rooms into the attic. I opened the attic door. All was quiet but there seemed to be a slight movement among some of the boxes in the attic.

"You can sleep here in the attic if you want," I said, and closed the attic door and locked it. There was no noise in the dorm. I waited up until midnight but heard nothing. Then I went up with my flashlight to the attic and unlocked the door. But there did not appear to be anyone inside. To this day I do not know if they were in the attic or under their beds, but I think they crawled through to the rooms on each side and quietly went to bed. I never mentioned the incident as I did not want to give them the satisfaction that they might have disturbed me. And no one commented about the incident thereafter.

As spring approached, my principal asked me to come to his office. He expected the deans to take care of student problems and discipline. Very rarely did students have to be called into his office for discipline. They knew his word was law and evaded encounters of that kind.

**Shocked.** When in his office, he said to me, "You work awfully hard, but you do something that antagonizes the kids. I dont know what it is, but find out what it is, and quit it." Then he told me he had hired a new dean for the next year. I could be her assistant and continue to teach the French classes, physical education for girls, and sponsor the school paper as I was doing. I was shocked and stunned to say the least. I had had no assistant. I knew the person he had hired. She would be graduating from college that spring and was known for all her activities at college. I imagined that I would be doing most of the dormitory work and she would be involved in her interests. She was a pleasant person but I was not sure I wanted to be her assistant.

When I left for the summer vacation, I packed all my things and addressed them for my home so they could be shipped home if I decided not to come back. I said to myself that if I got an opportunity to take another position in another school I might accept.

I did receive an invitation to the academy in my own state and accepted. I would be dean of girls and teach English and girls physical education. The next two years were very good. My principal was strong on recreation, good relationships, and spiritual development of the students. We had good times together.

Then a letter came to me from one faculty member at the former school stating that my former principal was looking for another dean of girls. He had had two different deans since I left. If I would write him that I would be willing to return, he might hire me back. That was a challenge. I enjoyed where I was, but if I could prove to him that I could handle the students without antagonizing them, I felt I would like to do that. So I wrote him.
I was now seeing things from the perspective of the students, trying to imagine how they would like to be talked to if they needed improvements. I put myself in their place to understand how I would feel if in their circumstances. Regulations were important but the feelings and attitudes of the students were more important. My perspective now was to reach the hearts of the students rather than be overly concerned about their outward appearance. He did accept me back. The students I had had as freshmen were now seniors.

**Needed.** We had three more good years together when the principal called me in again. He informed me that he was holding a call for me to go to Argentina to be dean of women in the college there. But he said, "You cannot go. You are needed here. There is no mission field as needy as right here." He recounted that for the last eight years either the dean of boys or dean of girls had changed after one year. The dean of boys promised to stay another year. If I would stay we could have the two deans working together for at least two years in succession.

I had already heard about the call to Argentina from someone from the General Conference. The call was important, they said, because I was a native born Argentinian and the Argentine government would only accept native born workers under the Peron regime. I felt I must accept.

My principal said, "Well, maybe if they can wait for another year you can go then but you are needed here at least for one more year." I appreciated his trust in me and I did stay another year. And the call to Argentina did wait for another year.

**Challenged.** The lessons I have learned from my two principals have been very valuable, and I appreciate having had the privilege of working with them both. They had different strengths which helped me to grow in my methods and in my spiritual outlook. Throughout the years I have praised my first principal for pointing out my weaknesses. He challenged me to examine myself and make changes that would put me in closer touch with the feelings and attitudes of the students.

It is natural for us to think we are all right but to be blind to our weaknesses which hinder our effectiveness. We do not like to be accused of errors or weaknesses. It takes courage to face a person and point out needed changes. I am forever grateful my principal called me in and told me directly to my face to find out what it was that antagonized students and quit it. Yes, I was shocked and stunned. But that set me to thinking about others and not myself.

**Thankful.** I am thankful that during my first year out of college as dean of girls, the principal gave me the incentive to see myself as others viewed me and to grow and improve in methods and behavior and in my spiritual responsibilities to God and my fellow beings. I wanted to work for the Lord and to honor Him with all my energy. But my perspective needed adjusting, and I was determined to find out how I could better have rewarding, satisfying relationships.

God can make a new creature out of every person when that person is willing to submit to His guidance. I have witnessed His creative power in the lives of many students, friends, and myself. I praise God every day for His goodness and mercy and for His everlasting kindness and love.
An experienced teacher and principal reflects on what he has learned.

Some years ago one of my students, whose grandfather was an excellent book binder, gave me a beautifully bound volume entitled All I Know About Teaching, with my name, as the author, boldly embossed in gold. Inside I found two hundred fifty-six pure-white pages with not one word printed on them—the pages were blank. At that time I was a principal who had a reputation among some for operating a well-ordered school.

Needless to say, the book was a source of humor to all who saw it and, of course, it served to form a most cordial bond between the gift-giver and me. It still has a prominent place on my library shelves. Over the years it has reminded me that there are many blank pages in my understanding of how to teach and how to manage a school or classroom.

Through those years, however, I have discovered four cardinal principles that can have a tremendous influence in creating a well-ordered school or classroom. They promote cooperative, congenial student behavior.

Before discussing these principles I wish to make some general observations about discipline.

WHAT IS DISCIPLINE?

If we should stop people on the street and ask, "What is discipline?" most would respond that discipline is punishment, connoting that discipline is negative. I want to consider the word in a much broader sense that includes punishment as only one aspect of a complex set of positive events and activities.

The derivation of the word itself denotes nurturing, cooperation, teaching, commitment, and loyalty, for it has the same roots as the words disciple and discipleship. Further, when the positive qualities of discipline are effectively practiced, the need for the negative aspect of punishment is often eliminated or is necessary only as a last resort.

Disciplinewhat I like to call "behavior management"is the part of teaching about which most new teachers have the deepest concern. And rightly so, for this is the area which most often determines a teachers success or failure. New teachers usually feel fairly confident about what to teach (subject content) and how to teach (methods of instruction), but they worry whether they will be able to control the behavior of the students in their classrooms. Understanding and practicing the following principles will greatly reduce discipline challenges.

Managing student behavior should not and need not be continual trial and error. Nor need it be "baptism by fire"! Rather, when teachers design a student-behavior-management plan based on
these principles and practice them ahead of time, their comfort quotient will escalate, student learning will increase, and both teachers and students are more likely to enjoy school. Otherwise, unprepared teachers are inclined to employ in their classrooms the same management procedures that their own teachers used, whether good or bad.

**PRINCIPLE ONE: Preplanning Is Vital.**

Preplanning prevents approximately 90 per cent of discipline problems. Contemplate the significance of that concept! Anticipating and planning ahead can eliminate the majority of management issues!

Practicing this principle means beginning the school year with the end of the year in mind. It means that teachers understand what they want to accomplish by the end of the year, and they plan ahead what is to happen day by day and week by week in order to reach those goals. It means getting acquainted with their students and the students parents, creating the classroom atmosphere (including décor and furniture arrangements), designing routines and procedures, developing communication plans, and organizing instruction. All this should be completed before the year begins. Accomplishing these projects is almost impossible after the year starts. Teachers who commence the year without thorough preplanning should anticipate student restlessness and lack of interest, which will emerge as behavior problems. All this may seem very obvious and overly simplistic, but the reality is that every year scores of teachers do not practice this principle, and classroom chaos results.

My thoughts turn back to my first year of teaching, when I was hired one week before the school year was to start. I had not completed college, had no formal preparation for teaching, and had not seriously envisioned myself as a teacher. Others apparently thought I should be one. I was too naïve to realize how unprepared I was or what a risk I was taking, and I accepted the position.

Suddenly I was in a classroom with 16 fifth- and sixth-graders. I had made no preparation for the year. I had no idea what they were to be taught, or how I was to teach them. It was classic managing by trial and error. I often reflect on what that year could have been had I known the importance of preplanning and had had the opportunity to practice it. Amazingly, the students survived the year and so did I. I cant testify how far the frontiers of knowledge were pushed back in their minds, but I can say that now, 50 years later, I know where many of those students are and regularly communicate with several of them.

**PRINCIPLE TWO: Celebrate the First Day of School.**

Most people believe that the last day is the most important day of the school year. They consider that what happens on that day determines the success of the year. Actually, the content of the first day is the most important factor in influencing the accomplishments of the year. What happens on the first day affects what is achieved on each and every day of the year thereafter, including the last day. In fact, some experts say that the tone for the year is set in the first ten minutes of the first day!

What teachers do and how they act on the first day are of tremendous importance. A successful first day is overt evidence of careful, thorough preparation. The first day makes or breaks the school year. It also makes or breaks the teacher. The first day decides who is in charge of the classroom, the teacher or the students. On the first day the classroom environment, whether businesslike or disorderly, is established. The quality of day-by-day student behavior and the degree of student achievement at the end of the year are directly related to the extent to which the teacher can implement such things as teachers-institute expectations, procedures, and routines during the very first day and the first few weeks. Wise teachers remember that there is no second first day!

On the first day teachers begin the process of transforming an aggregate group of individuals into a social groupa communityand, ideally, into a family. Starting with the first minute, they teach the students that they (the students) have entered a highly productive and well-managed learning environment. Effective teachers spend the first two weeks teaching routines and
procedures and having the students practice them, including procedures for managing behavior so that managing by emotion is avoided.

Creative teachers conduct the first day with style, class and flourish. While they make the first day business-like, fun activities and traditional events are included. In other words, the first day is made a memorable celebration. When the year is begun in this manner, discipline problems will be diminished to a remarkable extent.

I am thinking of a young man who, from the students perspective, was among the most popular in the school. He was very talented in sports, music and leadership, and he had a dynamic personality. Even with all his abilities he was a "pain in the neck" to some of the teachers. On one occasion I was away from the school for several days. On the day I returned, as I passed him in the hall, this young man very unobtrusively slipped his arm around me and said quietly, "I missed you while you were gone. I am glad you are back. The school runs better when you are here, and I feel more secure." These words from this unlikeliest of students demonstrated the security he felt when the established procedures and regular routines he was accustomed to were followed. I have often remembered his words and realized that, if one so self-confident as he valued a well-ordered school environment, how very important it is for students in general to have the stability of a well-organized school experience from the very first day.

The Teachers Hymn. The words of a well-loved hymn give focus to the final two principles. The hymn's words take on new meaning when read through teacher eyes and sung from a teacher heart. This prayer, written by Washington Gladden, so eloquently captures the essence of teaching and guiding student behavior that I have designated it, "The Teachers Hymn." As you contemplate the words, let the beauty of this petition to the Master Teacher sweep over your soul.

O Master, let me walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me Thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move
By some clear, winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay,
And guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me Thy patience; still with Thee
In closer, dearer company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong;

In hope that sends a shining ray
Far down the futures broadening way;
In peace that only Thou canst give,
With Thee, O Master, let me live.

(Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, 574)

PRINCIPLE THREE: Accentuate the Positive.

A jaunty World War II tune, written by Johnny Mercer and called "Accentuate the Positive," succinctly expresses the spirit of this grand principle:

Youve got to accentuate the positive,
Eliminate the negative.
Latch on to the affirmative. . . .
Youve got to spread joy up to the maximum,
Bring gloom down to the minimum
Have faith or pandemonium
Though Mr. Mercer was not intentionally describing classroom dynamics (other phrases in the song indicate that a Southern country preacher is speaking), he made a profound statement about classroom reality. Truly, pandemonium and gloom do pervade the classroom where the negative (nagging, threatening, punishment) is accentuated. Competent teachers limit student off-task behavior by arranging the room so they can be in close proximity to the students by moving among them while they are teaching, rather than scolding or fretting with their voices. Successful teachers stand much of the time when teaching, because they know that off-task behavior escalates as much as 75 per cent when teachers are seated. They convey an attitude of seriousness about their expectations for student behavior. They always seek to discipline students privately rather than publicly. They know that the very best discipline is the kind that no one notices. They try to make positive eye contact with every student in the first few minutes of the first day and every day thereafter.

Their goal is to create a classroom ambiance that is both productive and positive. This is a very important concept. The ideal is for students to be intrinsically motivated to cooperate. The reality is that intrinsic motivation must be taught just as every other good outcome is taught in school. The further reality is that until students are intrinsically motivated to cooperate, their cooperation is based on what they will receive in exchange for their cooperation. The commodity that teachers have the most of and have control over is time. They reward acceptable behavior by gifting students with time to engage in learning activities that they (the students) prefer and enjoy.

Positive Terms. Respected teachers state behavior expectations in positive terms. The terms may even contrast acceptable behavior with what is unacceptable. For example, instead of the rule saying, *Do not swear* it might be stated: *The student uses pure language and avoids the appearance of evil rather than using profane language or indulging in lewd conduct or suggestions, or possessing or displaying obscene materials.*

Ellen White presents very valuable guidelines for establishing expectations for student behavior. She indicates that the expectations should (1) improve the students standing in society, (2) elevate their character, (3) ennoble their minds, and (4) increase their happiness (see Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, pp. 99-100). These guidelines have been a tremendous assistance to me as I have written student handbooks and codes of conduct. They have been very helpful also when explaining to students the rationale for rules and regulations.

The most significant aspect of this principle pertains to the value that a teacher places on individual students. Recognizing their potential and emphasizing their positive qualities has enormous influence eliminating negative behavior. While visiting in a distant city recently I was invited to have dinner with two of my former students, a young married couple who are highly successful in their careers and are leaders in their church.

As a young person the husband experienced considerable family dysfunction. Over dinner he told me that I had been a positive male role model during his teen years when he had no other. He said, "I have always been amazed at how much you have believed in me, and I feel that you have a lot to do with who I am today." I, in turn, am amazed at the profound long-range effect a little comment of regard, a brief statement of encouragement, a casual inquiry like "How are you doing?" may have upon a young persons life.

**PRINCIPLE FOUR: Develop Relationships With Students.**

The most important thing, bar none, that teachers can do for their students is to develop...
positive relationships with them. Teachers are hired to affect lives; this is their foremost responsibility. It comes before mathematics, science, social studies, and all the rest. Love is the most powerful tool they have. A student in my university course (whom I had earlier expelled from high school several times for major citizenship violations) penned these profound words when writing in his teacher education journal about student-teacher relationships: "Knowledge will not fill our words with warmth nor cause a single student to learn," affirming that rapport comes before subject content. It is best to begin with the students with whom they have the best rapport and to extend their ever-broadening circle of friendship until every possible student is included. Some students may resist the teachers efforts, and 100 per cent success may not be achievable.

Ellen White describes Christ's method for establishing relationships, which, she says, is the only avenue for reaching people. Teachers who follow His manner will mingle with their students, be concerned about their welfare, show compassion for them, minister to their needs, and win their confidence. Then they may anticipate their students' allegiance (see *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Regardless of how unlovely and inconsiderate their students may be, teachers should pray that they may see them as persons for whom Christ died and thus recognize the students' inestimable value. They should try to view themselves as their students' defense attorney. It is truly amazing, but when teachers treat their students as though they are perfect, the students tend to act in accordance with the way they are treated. "The Saviors ruleAs ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise should be the rule of all who undertake the training of children and youth. . . . Christ's rule should be sacredly observed toward the dullest, the youngest, the most blundering, and even toward the erring and rebellious" (*Education*, pp. 292-293).

Associated with developing relationships with students is the opportunity teachers have to lead their students to Christ and to invite them to accept Him as their personal Savior. This is a privilege every teacher should treasure and make a priority. There is no greater reward for teachers than to have a role in this truly awesome experience.

I had taken a group of students to a distant town to present a special program in the local church there. A member of the program team was the president of the senior class. He had been president of his class for all of his four high school years. Though he was a social leader, his spiritual leadership was not strong and his lifestyle tended to be secular. We spent Friday afternoon, which happened to be his birthday, practicing for the program. While others were practicing I took a seat beside him to wish him a happy birthday. As our conversation continued I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to ask him about his relationship with Jesus and whether he had considered giving his life to the Lord. He thanked me for asking and said he wanted to make that commitment. When we returned to school, plans were made for him to be baptized at the conclusion of the senior class consecration service on Friday evening of graduation weekend. His baptism was a wonderful witness for the influence of Christian education. Today his children are enrolled in the church school in the town where they live and he is a major financial contributor to improving the school. Twelve years after his baptism he said to me, "Your loyal, loving, forgiving friendship has inspired my recognition and acceptance of the unconditional nature of God's love. . . . Reminding me of God's love, your undying faith will be in my thoughts all the days of my life."

Teachers should be cautious that their relationship with their students is that of an adult friend and advocate and not a "buddy." Some think that in order to truly relate to students it is necessary to be their buddy. They are wrong. Loyalty will not result from a buddy student-teacher relationship, but contempt might.

**PRINCIPLE FIVE: When the first four fail.**
Not all students will respond to the positive effect of these four principles. Ten to 12 per cent of the students may not cooperate with the routines and procedures teachers establish in order to assure a well-ordered classroom. Before the school year begins, teachers should carefully design a discipline plan, including consequences, which may be applied to those cases when students repeatedly interfere with the classroom learning process. The plan may begin with verbal admonition and become sequentially more significant to include parents and/or administrators.

THE TEACHERS PRAYER

Moses has reached the end of his life. He prays that he may say the right words in the right way as he addresses the children of Israel for the last time. This is a prayer for those who wish their management and discipline to have a positive effect. The words have such a beautiful and profound implication for all who have the privilege of nurturing the minds, characters, and souls of children and youth that I refer to it as "The Teachers Prayer":

Let my teaching fall like rain
and my words descend like dew,
like showers on new grass,
like abundant rain on tender plants.

(Deut 32:2 NIV.)

**Accentuate the Positive** appeared in a film copyrighted in 1944 and may possibly be in the public domain now. I found it by searching on the Internet for "Accentuate the Positive." "Lible" is how it is in the original.
Below are some documents and letters that may be helpful to local churches in monitoring the spiritual health of their members and encouraging decisions about each one's ongoing commitment.

**Dear Friends:**

Please take some prayerful time to examine the following believer's covenant and come tomorrow evening at 6 o'clock to the Junior room for discussion and refining of this document.

Thank you.

Pastor

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**THE BELIEVER'S ANNUAL COVENANT**

Having tasted and accepted the grace and goodness of God Almighty, and desiring membership in the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of __________, I commit myself to a daily, growing relationship with my God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Consequently:

Recognizing that all humans are created in God's image, I shall love and value others (Lev. 19:18; Jn. 13:34, 35).

Recognizing that God had my best interest in mind when giving His holy commandments, I shall live morally and ethically right (Ex. 20:2-17; Jn. 14:15).

Recognizing that all things belong to a generous God, I shall return my faithful tithes and offerings to His church (Mal. 3:10; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7).

Recognizing that on the Lord's day, the Sabbath, He has chosen to fellowship with His children in His sanctuary, I shall attend worship services regularly (Lk. 4:16; Heb. 10:25).

Recognizing that the good news of God's grace and salvation given me are too glorious to hide, I shall be a living witness to His mercy and goodness (Mk. 5:19; 1 Pet. 2:9).

Recognizing that God has endowed me with gifts and talents for His glory, I shall serve God with my spiritual gifts (1 Pet. 4:10; Eph. 4:11, 12).

Name: __________________________

Signed: _________________________ Date: ____________
Annual Church Membership Covenant

Having tasted and accepted the grace and goodness of God Almighty, I desire continued membership in the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of __________________ .

Name: ________________________ Signed: _________________________ Date: __________

Another letter that is helpful:

Date

Dear ___________ ,

It has been several years since we have seen you in our church. Since you are now living outside of this area, we would like to encourage you to transfer your membership to a Seventh-day Adventist church near you. The Church Manual states that when a member has left the area for six months, he or she should transfer church membership. This is to help the local church you are attending to be able to minister to you and help you grow spiritually. If this is your wish, ask the clerk of the church near you to request a recommendation from our church for your membership transfer. This will allow us to keep our records up-to-date and accurate.

Please assist us in doing this. And please stop by and visit with us whenever you are in this area. Above all else, don't permit your moving out of this area to lessen your interest in the church. Become active in the church, and maintain a growing Christian experience. We shall be very happy to hear from you. Let us know how things are going with you. In the meantime, rest assured that we are continuing to remember you in our prayers. In His service, Church Clerk (or Church Board)

As a follow-up letter to this:

Date

Dear ____________ ,

It has been some time now since you moved away from here, and so far we have not heard from you. You will recall our letter of (date). We are wondering whether or not you have gotten established in the church there. Sometimes during the process of a move, situations develop that make it easy to drop out or lose interest. We surely hope that this is not the case with you. If you have not been attending the church, won't you start attending regularly without further delay? Introduce yourself to the pastor and to some of the members, and manifest an interest in the program. Also, as suggested in the previous letter, have the clerk write to our church clerk for a transfer of membership. There is little we can do for you at such a distance. But the local church near you needs your talents and input, and you can benefit from its fellowship. Now won't you please write us a letter and let us know how things are with you? Also, don't forget to stop by and visit with us if you are in our area.

Yours in the Savior's name,

Pastor