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Editor's Corner - Guest Editorial

Jerry A. Stevens
Editor/Director, Reading Services
Christian Record Services, Inc.

From the time I first came across a copy of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM shortly after its beginning in 1987, I have sensed that this journal represented the true voice of orthodox Seventh-day Adventism. AFFIRM's object, it strikes me, is not to polarize fellow believers but to bind them more securely to the pillars that undergird a faith that everyone legitimately can hold in common. More than ever we need faithful watchmen on the walls of Zion, watchmen with the spiritual backbone to give the warning trumpet … an uncertain sound? No! a certain sound. Instead of polemics and negativism, AFFIRM offers confirmation and affirmation that God’s remnant church will stay on track as long as it remains submissive to His will and concentrates on "whatsoever things" are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. See Philippians 4:8.

Since the AFFIRM editorial board has been gracious enough to solicit my help with this issue, I feel the need to confide to our readers that my editorial style may seem a little peculiar. Just as peculiarly, editorial "conventions" seem to vary widely. English grammar, I daresay, is no exact science.

Permit me to illustrate my point. When it comes to capitalization, I have what some consider a quirky hobbyhorse. I like to think of it as a passion. It’s about the use of capitals in words that refer to Deity. Since Jesus is every bit as much "God" as is God the Father, for instance, why do so many writings, including most versions of the Bible, seem to demote "Him" merely to a low "him" status? See what I mean? So if you follow my logic, I think if ever there was anyone in the universe deserving of all words that refer to Him beginning with capital letters, it would have to be God … in any of His various Persons and functions. I want everyone to know Who He (notice the initial capital letters in both previous words) is, and make no apologies for that. I hope you agree. If nothing else, expedient capitalization of certain pronouns helps avoid ambiguity and therefore confusion when the reader otherwise is left wondering which individual is referenced. If this subject bores you, just let it operate quietly in the background. I’m okay with that. But don’t quit reading here!

The issue of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM that you hold in your hands fairly throbs with powerful statements about forgiveness—statements viewing the subject from a variety of angles. To get you started, I append a true story of an incident that happened "on my watch" a few years back. I believe the Holy Spirit gave me a creative idea that really helped defuse a potentially nasty and destructive situation.

Ron du Preez follows with his handling of forgiveness as illustrated by Christ Himself in a penetrating parable. Watch for some dramatic numerical comparisons to leap out at you; Ron’s approach to this topic is persuasive! Ron then relates the nightmarish experience of a Cuban pastor who survived unimaginable suffering for his faith. See how this pastor responded toward
his captors and ex-wife; it will challenge your own faith.

Next, thrill with us as you read a gripping account of multiple missionary murders in Micronesia, and the magnificent Christian witness that ensued. Then meditate with Randy Skeete on why forgiveness is a nonnegotiable commodity, especially in these last days of Earth’s history.

Read on! Jules Lumbu contributes a powerful account of forgiveness in action—even forgiveness of a loving husband’s brutal murderer. Sam Pipim checks in with his characteristically thorough and incisive treatment of our topic.

We round out this issue with three additional articles very much worth your time. Let Ellen White have the last word on forgiveness as you prayerfully absorb her inspired pieces on this spiritually essential topic. Nestled between her two articles is Gerhard Pfandl’s thoughtful coverage of conflict resolution.

May our merciful, forgiving Lord bless you, dear reader, as you spend some quality time with this issue. Our prayer is that your faith will be confirmed and your beliefs affirmed in the process. What a privilege is mine of being associated with such a vital publication and its loyal band of subscribers. May your tribes only continue to increase!

Bury the Hatchet

A devotional delivered at a nominating committee on which I served as chair.

Two of the committee members, ladies in this instance, had had a long history of open antagonism on virtually any given issue. Their history of loudly hostile verbal attacks on one another had long been a source of embarrassment and had placed a stumbling block in the way of progress for an entire congregation. My aim was to generalize an entreaty enough so that the individuals wouldn’t be embarrassed but would still get the message.

The "tomahawk, or war hatchet, was one of the handiest weapons and tools of the North American Indian."

"Tomahawks served as war clubs and hunting weapons. Some tomahawks were saved as heirlooms and handed down from father to son. These weapons often had long and bloody histories.

"The Indians...buried them when they made peace with an enemy, and dug them up when they made war. From these old Indian customs come our present-day expressions, burying the hatchet and digging up the hatchet" (World Book, art. "Tomahawk").

In the time of the prophet Ezekiel, Mount Seir was a mountainous land at the southern end of the Dead Sea and was possessed by inhabitants known as Edomites, the descendants of Esau. Through the prophet, God spoke a stern message of impending doom: "Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred,...I will make thee perpetual desolations. ...Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord God, I will even do according to thine envy which thou hast used out of thy hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them, when I have judged thee....Thou shalt be desolate, O Mount Seir..." (Ezekiel 35:5, 9, 11, 15). The enemies of God’s people (His church) always reap a bitter harvest.

I then said something to this effect: "If, by chance, my brothers and sisters, there is someone here tonight who has an 'axe to grind' or who hasn't 'buried the hatchet' or who keeps 'digging up the hatchet,' may I entreat you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Prince of Peace, to signify your intent to be at peace with all the members in God’s church by going the Indians one better? Rather than merely burying our hatchets, let us commit them to the flames so that there are no fragments ever to be dug up. Let us determine to build up rather than tear down."

Action: To symbolize our corporate willingness to put this sad chapter behind us, I had previously traced a small picture of an Indian peace pipe tomahawk on paper, giving all committee members a personalized copy with their own names written thereon. I then offered
to commit the entire heap to the flames.

I continued something along these lines: "Now, let us proceed, in unity, to the Lord’s sacred business in [our local church]. Shall we pray?"

**Result:** Our generalized entreaty, followed immediately by concrete action, seemed to defuse the situation entirely. For the time being, at least, we were able to conduct sacred business with better efficiency. I praise God for planting an idea within me, thus allowing His Spirit to nudge others into an attitude of true forgiveness!
The de Paiva Forgiveness Story

Author Unknown

Forgiving the Unthinkable

A Catholic attorney working in Palau became very close friends with Ruimar de Paiva and his family. The de Paiva family had been serving as missionaries in Palau and were making a powerful impact on many people in that North Pacific island republic. The attorney wrote his account of the funeral service held in December 2003 for the de Paiva family, three of whom were murdered. Only their daughter Melissa, survived, herself badly injured in the attack. Excerpts from the attorneys account follow, with minimal editing to preserve its flavor.

A memorial service was held at four in the afternoon for Ruimar, his wife Margaret, and their son. In attendance were Ruimars father and mother, Elder Itamar and Ruth de Paiva, along with Itamars two brothers, Emerson and Hernan. The family of Mrs. Ruimar (Margaret) de Paiva was unable to attend.

The service was long but occasioned a truly life-changing experience. After four hours, the attorney was ready to stand up and shout, "Enough, already!" when Ruimars mother did something so intensely selfless that the attorney broke down and wept.

Ruth de Paiva, the closest relative of the murdered family, took the microphone without warning or announcement, and proceeded to demonstrate a level of unsurpassed forgiveness. In the week that she had been in Palau, she had met Justin Hirosi, the man who had murdered her son, daughter-in-law, and only grandson. She prayed with him and let him know that she had already forgiven him. He cried.

Now having just learned that Justins mother was at the memorial service, Mrs. de Paiva asked Mrs. Hirosi to join her onstage. Mrs. Hirosi was unable to walk alone and was aided to the stage by her brother and several neighbors. Ruimars mother hugged her so warmly that the casual observer would have believed the two were long-lost friends. Together they stepped to the microphone, and Mrs. de Paiva announced that they were "both mothers grieving for lost sons." You could hear a pin drop; there was absolute silence. Then tears began to flow.

Mrs. de Paiva continued. She implored the Palauan community to remove any shroud of blame that might cover Justins family. She said that the de Paivas did not blame Justins family for the tragedy. No one else should either, she said. "We raise our children, we educate them, we teach them right and wrong. That is all we as mothers can do."

This display of kindness and forgiveness was amazing. The high chief of the island on which the tragedy occurred came to the microphone and announced, "If we follow Palauan tradition to its fullest extent, Melissa is now the daughter of Mrs. Hirosi, and Mrs. de Paiva is a mother to Justin." He expressed shame, regret, and sorrow on behalf of Justins family, his clan, and his entire tribe.
Then Justin's uncle, the most senior male member of the family, stepped forward. The high chief explained that Justin's family and clan, though of meager means, had sold many of their belongings and now desired to deliver $10,000 in cash to Melissa for her college education. The whole congregation was emotionally moved, and many tears were shed.

Ten-year-old Melissa had been strong throughout the service. When asked where she would like to live, she answered, "I'd like to stay here in Palau." When told that her extended family was waiting for her in Texas, she said, "But I will be back someday; I'll come back as a missionary." Soon thereafter the entire de Paiva family boarded a plane bound for Dallas, where the family of the late Margaret de Paiva was waiting.

The de Paiva family accomplished more in their death than they ever could have in life. They taught that it is best to forgive and forget. "Love your neighbor as yourself."
What is genuine forgiveness?

It is said that the most forgiven people should be the most forgiving people. And yet, this is easier said than done. Some of us are too hurt to forgive those who have wounded us.

**Why Must We Forgive and Forget?** The Bible offers us several reasons why we should forgive those who have wronged us. Because of space limitations, I concentrate on what I consider to be the most compelling reason why we must forgive and forget—namely, for Christ’s sake. This motivation is beautifully captured in a story found in the book of 2 Samuel.

**DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH**

A Determined Quest. Chapter 9 begins with King David’s earnest question: "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathans sake?" (v.1). David is searching for someone from the household of Saul, his worst enemy. The king wants to show kindness to Saul’s descendants "for Jonathans sake." Though there seems to be no immediate response to his question, David does not give up.

Inquiry is made, and King Saul’s former servant Ziba reports to David, who repeats the question and explains the nature of the kindness he wants to bestow on such a one: "And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" (v. 3).

What David doesn’t know is that there is only one descendant of Saul left. He is a cripple named Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul. At the time of David’s inquiry, Mephibosheth is now a married man living in exile in a faraway town called Lo-debar. The Bible offers only a brief account of how he became crippled.

The Fall and Exile. One day, when Mephibosheth was only five years old, word got to the palace that in the war between the Israelites and the Philistines at Jezreel, King Saul had been killed. Prince Jonathan had also been killed. In fact, virtually all of Saul’s children and grandchildren had been wiped out. Saul had a considerable family (see 1 Chronicles 8:33), but it was virtually wiped out literally overnight.

The Bible tersely recounts the story in 2 Samuel 4:4: "And Jonathan, Sauls son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame."
That fall crippled him for life. Over the years, Davids enemies led Mephibosheth to harbor hostility toward David, whom they characterized as a usurper (see Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 713), sheltering him in exile at Lo-debar, east of the Jordan.

**The Search.** In the security of a highly successful enthronement in Israel, the Bible depicts David as having one overriding concern. It is not to consolidate his power but to offer special honor to any descendants of his archenemy, Saul. By this time Mephibosheth has married and begotten a son. A good many years have gone by since his accident at the age of five.

**Face-to-Face Encounter.** The Scriptural account of the meeting of Mephibosheth and David reveals how hatred was swallowed by love, and fear by trust. It is worth reading in its entirety:

"Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy fathers sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am? Then the king called to Ziba, Sauls servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy masters son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy masters son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy masters son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the kings sons. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the kings table; and was lame on both his feet" (2 Samuel 9:6-13).

**The Gospel of Salvation.** Davids treatment of Mephibosheth teaches several important lessons. First, it is one of the greatest illustrations of the Gospel. It reveals something about the riches of the grace of God, in the conversion of runaway sinners.

In this true story, David represents God the Father, sitting on His throne and seeking to show kindness to us sinners. Though we hate Him, misconstrue His intentions and plans toward us, yet He still loves us and intensely searches for ways to save us. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1)!

Mephibosheth represents uslost humanity, crippled by sin. Like Sauls grandson, we also fell in a garden called Eden (Genesis 3). Because of that Fall, we cannot "walk" straight nor do anything straight. We hate God, distrust Him, and disbelieve His Word. Far away from the Fathers home, we live in the exile of sin. The Bible declares, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Though created in the image of God and hence from the Royal Family, we are so degraded by sin that we feel like "dead dogs." We indeed deserve death, for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). Notice, however, that this text does not end there. It continues, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

Jonathan represents our Lord Jesus Christ. The only way we Mephibosheths can be saved is through Jesus. The name Jonathan means "gift of God." It is not surprising that the greatest Gift God has given humanity is His Son. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, emphasis mine).

Thus, when we read the phrase "for Jonathans sake" in the 2 Samuel 9 account, it really means "for Christs sake." The only reason why God shows kindness to us, pardoning our sins and making us His sons and daughters, is for Christs sake. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His names sake" (1 John 2:12).

It is for Christs sake that we Mephibosheths are adopted as sons and daughters of God: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that..."
believe on His name" (John 1:12). It is also for Christ's sake that we have the assurance of eternal life, the promise of His indwelling Spirit, and the hope of living forever with God (1 John 5:13; cf. Romans 8:14-39).

**Our Ethical Obligation to Others.** The second lesson we learn from the account of David's treatment of Mephibosheth is our ethical obligation to others. Why was David so eager to show kindness?

The answer is found in 1 Samuel 20:11-17. There we read that David made a promise to Jonathan that one day he (David) would pay back the kindness he himself had received from Jonathan. David could have satisfied his conscience saying Jonathan was dead or that Mephibosheth never requested help. But no, the king inquired and searched until he found Mephibosheth.

Though Mephibosheth never requested help, though he hated David and thus didn't deserve help, yet David showed kindness to him "for Jonathan's sake." Mephibosheth received favor on account of the merits of Jonathan. This is grace at work.

Have you been searching for that one person you owe a debt—a schoolteacher, nurse, aunt, grandmother, pastor, friend, etc.? Is there a promise you have long neglected? Now is the time to make good on it. Better late than never.

**The Motivation to Forgive.** The third lesson we can learn from David's treatment of Mephibosheth is the motivation to forgive. Why would David show kindness to Mephibosheth, making him one of the king's sons and allowing him to eat perpetually at the king's table? Why would he adopt as his son one who hated him and who potentially could work to undermine and usurp his government? Why did David forgive this grandchild of his avowed enemy?

The twice-stated answer is: "For Jonathan's sake" (2 Samuel 9:1, 7).

In the phrase "for Jonathan's sake," we find the most compelling motivation to forgive others. As we mentioned earlier, this phrase means "for Christ's sake." In other words, if we are looking for a reason to forgive and forget the ills we have suffered at the hands of others, the answer lies in what Jesus, our divine Jonathan, has done for us. Those who understand the price Christ paid on Calvary for their sins will not stubbornly withhold forgiveness from those who have hurt them. This is why the most forgiven person ought to be the most forgiving one. Though it hurts to forgive, the Bible urges us for Christ's sake to do the unthinkable. Observe how often the expression "for Christ's sake" appears in the New Testament:

1. We must forgive one another for Christ's sake: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

2. We must pray for one another for Christ's sake: "For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30).

3. We must become fools in the eyes of others and be despised for Christ's sake: "We are fools for Christ's sake; but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised" (1 Corinthians 4:10).

4. We must preach the truth and be true servants of God for Christ's sake: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

5. We must patiently endure the trials of life for Christ's sake: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

6. We must be willing to suffer for Christ's sake: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of
Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer \textit{for His sake}" (Philippians 1:29).

7. We must suffer persecution for Christ's sake: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh \textit{for His bodys sake}, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

8. We must be willing to die for Christ's sake: "For we which live are alway delivered unto death \textit{for Jesus sake}, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:11).

9. We must submit to good ordinances of those in power for Christ's sake: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man \textit{for the Lords sake}: whether it be to the king, as supreme" (1 Peter 2:13).

10. The Lord will richly bless and save us if we endure unto the end for Christ's sake: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, \textit{for My sake}" (Matthew 5:11; cf. Luke 6:22). "And ye shall be hated of all men \textit{for My names sake}: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Mark 13:13).

It is obvious from the above passages that the most compelling reason to do the right thing, including forgiving those who have hurt us, is "for Christ's sake." The more we understand the amazing grace of God's forgiveness, the more our motivation to forgive others. The basis and motivation to forgive others is what Christ has done for us.

**What It Means to Forgive and Forget.** Forgiveness is a conscious decision of the mind and heart to remit freely the offense of another, regardless of the cost. Unfortunately, many of us have difficulty forgiving others because we confuse forgiveness with what it is not.

1. **Forgiveness is not excusing** the wrong conduct of others. Excusing says, "That's okay," and seems to suggest that what a person did was really wrong or that he or she couldn't help it. But forgiveness is not excusing or justifying the wrong conduct of a person. On the contrary, the very nature of forgiveness suggests that what a person did was wrong and inexcusable. Covering up sin (which is what excusing is) cannot bring about forgiveness. The Bible says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). True forgiveness honestly acknowledges that something a person did is wrong, but chooses, by the grace of God, to overlook it.

2. **Forgiveness is not weakness.** Sometimes we think that when we forgive others it is a sign of weakness or cowardice. Who wants to be perceived as a doormat? The truth, however, is that forgiveness never springs from weakness, but rather from a position of strength and power. It takes a person with patience and inner strength to forgive. When God chooses to forgive us, it is not because He is powerless. Only those with resolute convictions and sterling character can forgive truly. The irony is that as long as we choose not to forgive, we become the slaves of those who have hurt us.

3. **Forgiveness is not merely forgetting.** Forgetting is to lose the remembrance or recollection of something. It is a passive process in which the passing of time causes a thing to fade from memory. Christian forgiveness, however, is not the result of amnesia. Instead, it is an active process in which a person makes a conscious choice not to mention, recount, or think about the injury suffered.

When God says He will remember your sins no more (see Hebrews 8:12), it does not mean He cannot remember our sins, but that He will not remember them. It is a conscious choice on His part not to reckon those sins against us or take action on them. Even better news is that when we make a conscious decision to forgive and to stop dwelling on the offense of another, the Lord works a miracle in us so that the hurt we have suffered loses its bite to the extent that the painful memory fades away.

4. **Forgiveness is not a feeling,** a fleeting emotional experience. It is a conscious choice, \textit{an act of the will}. Forgiveness is a decision not to think, or talk about, or be influenced by, the ill
Two Greek words are often translated as "forgive." The first, *aphiemi*, means to let go, release, or remit. It is a term used to describe the full payment or cancellation of a debt (see Matthew 6:12; 18:27, 32). The other word is *charizomai*, which means to bestow favor freely or unconditionally. This term suggests that forgiveness is an act of grace. It is undeserved and cannot be earned (see Luke 7:42, 43; 2 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). Both terms imply that the one doing the forgiving suffers some loss or pain. This is what happened on Calvary when our Lord Jesus Christ chose to suffer and die in order to secure our forgiveness (see Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24).

Though forgiveness is not a feeling, and though the decision to forgive hurts, the good news is that this conscious act of the will to forgive also brings about changes in our feelings: we experience inner peace and joy in doing God's will.

**Must We Forgive and Forget?**

Our willingness or unwillingness to forgive reveals much about us. Any time we cherish an unforgiving attitude, stubbornly withholding forgiveness from others, let us remember the following facts:

1. **Our unforgiving spirit reveals how we want God to treat us.** When we get very hurt, we often say things like, "I will never forgive him" or, "Though I will forgive, I will never forget what he did to me." Others say, "I will always stay away or not talk to her again as long as I live." What would happen if God applied the Golden Rule and treated us the same way we treat others? (The Golden Rule, by the way, says in essence, "Do unto others what you want to be done unto you"; see Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31.)

   How would you feel if, after confessing your sins to the Lord you hear a voice from Heaven saying, "I have forgiven you, but I just dont want to have anything to do with you again"? Or what if the Lord spoke to you audibly: "I have forgiven you, but I will never forget what you did to Me"? I dont think many would feel secure in that kind of "forgiveness"!

   The Scriptures urge us to forgive others, just as God has forgiven us. The Lord has freely forgiven us; we also must do likewise to others. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:13).

2. **Our unforgiving spirit reveals our unappreciation of God's forgiveness.** A forgiven Christian is always forgiving. If we dont forgive others it is an indication that we dont value Christ's forgiveness. This fact is remarkably captured in Christ's parable of the two debtors in Matthew 18:21-35. In this story, one servant owes a king a substantial debt. When the king threatens to sell the servant and his family to pay the debt, the servant pleads for mercy. The king is "moved with compassion," has mercy on him, and forgives him the debt (v. 27).

   Moments later, the forgiven servant sees a fellow servant who owes him a much smaller debt. When he asks for payment, the man pleads for time. But the forgiven servant refuses. He "went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt" (v. 30). When the king hears about this, he summons the forgiven-turned-unforgiving servant and says (vv. 32, 33): "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" In his anger the king hands over the unforgiving debtor to be punished. Jesus concludes the parable: "So likewise shall My Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (v. 35).

3. **Our unforgiving spirit reveals whether or not we shall receive and/or retain our forgiveness.** In the teachings of Christ, we learn that unless we forgive, God will not forgive us. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who trespass against us..." (Matthew 6:12, var.). He continues: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (vv. 14, 15).
4. *Our unforgiving spirit reveals disloyalty and lack of love for God.* The story of Job teaches that our severe trials—including the hurts and tragedies we have suffered—reveal whether or not we love God. When Satan asked, "Doth Job fear God for naught?" (Job 1:9), he was in effect saying that Christians cannot continue serving the Lord when they suffer major hurts. Or as he put it, "Skin for skin, yea, *all that a man hath will he give for his life.* But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face" (Job 2:3-5).

In the great controversy between Christ and Satan, our response to hurts is a vote for or against God. We either glorify God or betray and mock Him by our attitude to adversities inflicted upon us by others. Whether or not we forgive and forget reveals our true loyalty to or love for God.

You see, the fundamental issue at stake whenever we face any trials (including hurts, losses, etc.) is this: Will we continue to trust God, believing that He knows what is best for us, and that He has power to sustain and deliver us? Will we do what He has asked us (in this case, to forgive others) even in illness, financial crises, embarrassment, pain, disappointment, ridicule, rejection, death, etc.? (see Job 19:6-27). Or will we do His will only when things go our way?

Perchance you have been hurt by someone near or dear—maybe a relative, co-worker, or spouse. The one who has wounded you seriously might even be a churchgoer. You may have been hurt, betrayed, defrauded, humiliated, or wounded by a fellow church member, elder, Sabbath School teacher, or pastor. And you cannot bring yourself to forgive. Perhaps you are still hurt and angry.

Regardless of the cause of your hurt, remember that your hurt is part of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In the light of that cosmic conflict, the Lord urges you to make a conscious decision to forgive the perpetrator of the offense. For as long as you continue to carry the bitterness and resentment, you will never be free. You will forever remain a slave of the person who has hurt you.

It could be that, even now as you read this page, your marriage is falling apart. Perhaps you are considering an unBiblical divorce (see Matthew 19:9) because of the hurt and pain you have suffered in your marriage. While we may not always understand why people choose to hurt us, remember that the Lord can bring something good out of our painful experiences, just as He did in the case of Joseph. After experiencing all sorts of hurt—jealousy, malice, and hatred from his brothers; harassment, blackmail, and false accusation from Mrs. Potiphar—the injustice of imprisonment in an Egyptian jail and being forgotten by one of his fellow prisoners—the Bible records that Joseph later understood that even in his terrible ordeal, God’s divine hand was still directing affairs for his good and the good of humanity (Genesis 45:5; 50:20).

Wrote Ellen G. White: "He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. Whatsoever comes to him comes from the Saviour, Who surrounds him with His presence. Nothing can touch him except by the Lord’s permission. All our sufferings and sorrows, all our temptations and trials, all our sadness and griefs, all our persecutions and privations, in short, all things work together for good. All experiences and circumstances are God's workmen whereby good is brought to us" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 489).

**Conclusion.** If you are struggling with unforgivingness, remind yourself of how God has forgiven you, and respond in kind. Well, David should know: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:8-12).

Forgiveness is possible when you understand and have experienced God’s Own forgiveness. If you are still wondering why you must forgive and forget. The story of David and Mephibosheth teaches us that the most compelling reason to forgive is not because that individual deserves it, but "*for Jonathans sake.*"
Tensions over doctrinal points and practical issues have been part of church life since the church's inception. It is the way we deal with conflicts in the church that will determine whether such events will make a church stronger or weaker.

Let us look at a few examples of conflict resolution in the New Testament, in order to find guidelines which will help us to deal with similar situations in the church today.

**Matthew 18:15-17**

The words of Christ in this passage are the primary basis for church discipline in cases of "sin in the church." Initially, the offending person is to be confronted privately, one-on-one, next in the company of one or two witnesses, and finally before the whole church, until the issue is resolved; or, if he refuses to listen, until the church parts company with him.

These basic guidelines include recognition of conflict, communication between opposing parties, and appeal to a higher authority. We shall illustrate these principles in studying a few passages that deal directly with the issue of doctrinal differences in the early church.

**Acts 15**

The Council of Jerusalem was convened to settle the first major theological dispute in the early church. The issue at the meeting of the apostles and Christian leaders at Jerusalem concerned the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. At the outset, the Jerusalem Christians considered themselves to be the faithful remnant within Judaism. After all, their men were all circumcised, they all knew the Jewish Scriptures, and they all worshiped at the Temple. However, when Gentiles began to enter the church, the groups Jewish identity was called into question. If Gentiles were accepted into the church without first accepting Judaism, then Christianity would become a new religion and altogether cease to be part of Judaism.

The apostles and elders decided to call a special meeting in which opposing sides could present their points of view. Two important items formed the agenda: 1. Can Gentiles be admitted into the church without circumcision? 2. What parts of the Mosaic Law apply to the Gentiles? Luke reports that there was "much disputing" (v. 7), and then gives us the gist of three speeches. Peter spoke first. On behalf of the Gentile mission, he reminded the assembly of how God had used him to preach to Cornelius household, and he recommended that no yoke be put upon Gentile Christians. The term "yoke" is particularly appropriate in this context: a proselyte, by undertaking to keep the Law of Moses, was said to "take up the yoke of the
kingdom of Heaven." In his conclusion, Peter emphasized that salvation comes not through keeping the law, but through the grace of the Lord (v. 11).

James, who at that time was the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17), summed up the debate and proposed some practical guidelines. With regard to the first issue, he recommended that circumcision be not required of Gentile Christians. As for the second issue, concerning the Mosaic Law, he suggested that certain restrictions be imposed upon the Gentile Christians. "That they abstain from pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" (15:20). This, he thought, was necessary for peace and mutual understanding between Jewish and Gentile Christians. In his opinion, Gentile Christians had to make concessions to the customs of the Jewish Christians, who still attended synagogues on the Sabbath where the Law of Moses was regularly read (v. 21). James apparently expected Jewish Christians to retain all that Judaism had given them, and that they would not separate from their synagogues.

From verse 22 we conclude that the majority of the people at this council accepted this decision, now happy to send a delegation to Antioch to inform the church of the decisions adopted by this council of apostles and elders. Although only the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch were represented, the decisions were considered binding on all Christians. This was probably due to the unique authority of the original apostles in the early church.

We see in this chapter a number of important principles for conflict resolution in the church. First, the opposing parties were invited to present their views before a gathering of church leaders. Second, much time was spent in discussion. Third, the decisions made at this meeting were accepted by the church at large.

### SUMMARY

The early church dealt with internal conflict by recognizing differences and openly sharing them. They acknowledged a common calling, testing issues against their sense of mission. Once a decision was reached, they rejoiced in the unity they experienced in the Holy Spirit and demonstrated this in subsequent action. They emphasized the supremacy of their mission, to which everything else was subordinated, and they did not tolerate "the antichrists" or disruptive elements within the community of saints.

The following guidelines are derived from the passages investigated, as well as from the entirety of New Testament teaching on conflict resolution:

1. Recognize that conflict exists: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses . . ." (Romans 16:17, NKJV). To take note of people who create dissension and divisiveness is the first step in dealing with it. It is always tempting to remain silent in the name of love and tolerance and to ignore dissension in the church. The results, however, can be devastating for the mission and internal functioning of the church.

2. Provide opportunities for discussion: "Paul and Barnabas had no small discussion and disputation with them" (Acts 15:2). In reference to the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17, resolution of conflicts should first be attempted in small circles of elected church officials before unresolved conflicts are brought before the whole church.

3. Expose error through the presentation of truth: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). The Word of God is "the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), which at times is uncomfortable to those who hear it. To expose error is never a pleasant task, but when truth is presented prayerfully and in love, the weakness of error will become apparent.

4. Deal wisely with those in error: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Jesus admonished His disciples to exhibit the gentleness of sheep when dealing with others. When confronted by "wolves," they were to be wise as
serpents (Genesis 3:1), while as innocent, or free from guile, as doves.

5. Present Christ, and Him crucified, as the solution to disunity: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). In contrast to those who fostered certain personality cults in Corinth, Paul concentrated on the central truths: Who Jesus is and what He did. The cross is the flagpole around which all Gods children can rally.

6. Test the issues against the overarching sense of mission: "We are laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Paul directed the thoughts of the Corinthian believers to the higher, common cause of preaching the Gospel to all the world. He appealed to them to rise above their differences and find harmony in something beyond all differences.

7. Be ready to forgive: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him: I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21, 22). There is no limit to Gods forgiveness, and so it also should be with the forgiveness of Jesus followers. Successful conflict resolution presupposes willingness to forgive one another.

8. Appeal to a higher church authority: "They determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:2). In the early church, the apostles and elders were considered to be the highest authority within the church. Yet from verse 22 it seems clear they did not attempt to settle the matter by decree, rather they involved the whole church in settling its disputes.

9. Accept the decisions of the corporate church: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven" (Matthew 18:18). The context of this verse is the subject of church discipline and not doctrinal disputes, though the latter can lead to church discipline. The book of Acts specifically indicates that in matters of theological differences, the decision of the Jerusalem Council was accepted by the church as a whole (Acts 15:28-31).

10. Recognize the authority of the church to dismiss members: "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10). In the preceding verse Paul mentions strife and contentions in the church produced by perverted teachers of the law (cf. 1 Timothy 1:7). In order to restore peace and harmony in the church, the proper method is to arrange at least two interviews with a person who stirs up strife and contention. If these interviews fail, the church is at liberty to exclude this divisive person from the community of believers. Dismissing a member should never be done lightly; but the apostolic guideline is clearhave nothing to do with him" (NIV). Such counsel does not exist in a vacuum; it is part of Gods total message in Scripture.
[One] grave evil that had arisen in the church was that of brethren going to law against one another. Abundant provision had been made for the settlement of difficulties among believers. Christ Himself had given plain instruction as to how such matters were to be adjusted. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee," the Saviour had counseled, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (Matthew 18:15-18).

To the Corinthian believers who had lost sight of this plain counsel, Paul wrote in no uncertain terms of admonition and rebuke. "Dare any of you," he asked, "having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"

Satan is constantly seeking to introduce distrust, alienation, and malice among Gods people. We shall often be tempted to feel that our rights are invaded, even when there is no real cause for such feelings. Those whose love for self is stronger than their love for Christ and His cause will place their own interests first and will resort to almost any expedient to guard and maintain them. Even many who appear to be conscientious Christians are hindered by pride and self-esteem from going privately to those whom they think in error, that they may talk with them in the spirit of Christ and pray together for one another. When they think themselves injured by their brethren, some will even go to law instead of following the Saviours rule.

Christians should not appeal to civil tribunals to settle differences that may arise among church members. Such differences should be settled among themselves, or by the church, in harmony with Christs instruction. Even though injustice may have been done, the follower of the meek and lowly Jesus will suffer himself "to be defrauded" rather than open before the world the sins of his brethren in the church.
Lawsuits between brethren are a reproach to the cause of truth. Christians who go to law with one another expose the church to the ridicule of her enemies and cause the powers of darkness to triumph. They are wounding Christ afresh and putting Him to open shame. By ignoring the authority of the church, they show contempt for God, Who gave to the church its authority. 


I saw that God was displeased with His people for becoming surety for unbelievers. I was directed to these texts: Proverbs 22:26: "Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts." Proverbs 11:15: "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretyship is sure." Unfaithful stewards! They pledge that which belongs to Another, their Heavenly Father, and Satan stands ready to aid his children to wrench it out of their hands. Sabbathkeepers should not be in partnership with unbelievers. Gods people trust too much to the words of strangers, and ask their advice and counsel when they should not. The enemy makes them his agents, and works through them to perplex and take from Gods people.

Some have no tact at wise management of worldly matters. They lack the necessary qualifications, and Satan takes advantage of them. When this is the case, such should not remain in ignorance of their task. They should be humble enough to counsel with their brethren, in whose judgment they can have confidence, before they carry out plans. I was directed to this text: "Bear ye one anothers burdens." Some are not humble enough to let those who have judgment calculate for them until they have followed their own plans, and have involved themselves in difficulties. Then they see the necessity of having the counsel and judgment of their brethren; but how much heavier the burden then than at first. Brethren should not go to law if it can be possibly avoided; for they thus give the enemy great advantage to entangle and perplex them. It would be better to make a settlement at some loss. 

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 200.

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee," Christ said, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17).

Our Lord teaches that matters of difficulty between Christians are to be settled within the church. They should not be opened before those who do not fear God. If a Christian is wronged by his brother, let him not appeal to unbelievers in a court of justice. Let him follow out the instruction Christ has given. Instead of trying to avenge himself, let him seek to save his brother. God will guard the interests of those who love and fear Him, and with confidence we may commit our case to Him Who judges righteously.

Too often when wrongs are committed again and again, and the wrongdoer confesses his fault, the injured one becomes weary, and thinks he has forgiven quite enough. But the Saviour has plainly told us how to deal with the erring: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). Do not hold him off as unworthy of your confidence. Consider "thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

If your brethren err, you are to forgive them. When they come to you with confession, you should not say, I do not think they are humble enough. I do not think they feel their confession. What right have you to judge them, as if you could read the heart? The Word of God says, "If he repent, forgive him. And if he trespasses against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4). And not only seven times, but seventy times seven, just as often as God forgives you.

We ourselves owe everything to Gods free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heirship with Christ. Let this grace be revealed to others.

Give the erring one no occasion for discouragement. Suffer not a Pharisical hardness to come...
in and hurt your brother. Let no bitter sneer rise in mind or heart. Let no tinge of scorn be
manifest in the voice. If you speak a word of your own, if you take an attitude of indifference,
or show suspicion or distrust, it may prove the ruin of a soul. He needs a brother with the Elder
Brothers heart of sympathy to touch his heart of humanity. Let him feel the strong clasp of a
sympathizing hand, and hear the whisper, Let us pray. God will give a rich experience to you
both. Prayer unites us with one another and with God. Prayer brings Jesus to our side, and
gives to the fainting, perplexed soul new strength to overcome the world, the flesh, and the
Devil. Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan.

When one turns away from human imperfections to behold Jesus, a divine transformation
takes place in the character. The Spirit of Christ working upon the heart conforms it to His
image. Then let it be your effort to lift up Jesus. Let the minds eye be directed to "the Lamb of
God, Which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And as you engage in this work,
remember that "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).

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"
(Matthew 6:15). Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unmerciful toward others
shows that he himself is not a partaker of Gods pardoning grace. In Gods forgiveness the heart
of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine
compassion flows into the sinners soul, and from him to the souls of others. The tenderness and
mercy that Christ has revealed in His Own precious life will be seen in those who become
sharers of His grace. But "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Romans
8:9). He is alienated from God, fitted only for eternal separation from Him.

It is true that he may once have received forgiveness; but his unmerciful spirit shows that he
now rejects Gods pardoning love. He has separated himself from God, and is in the same
condition as before he was forgiven. He has denied his repentance, and his sins are upon him
as if he had not repented.

But the great lesson of the parable lies in the contrast between Gods compassion and mans
hardheartedness; in the fact that Gods forgiving mercy is to be the measure of our own.
"Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on
thee?"

We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is
found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we
have made that love our own. Wherefore Christ says, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall
be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

Christians should regard it as a religious duty to repress a spirit of envy or emulation. They
should rejoice in the superior reputation or prosperity of their brethren, even when their own
character or achievements seem to be cast in the shade. It was the pride and ambition
cherished in the heart of Satan that banished him from Heaven. These evils are deeply rooted
in our fallen nature, and if not removed they will overshadow every good and noble quality
and bring forth envy and strife as their baleful fruits.

We should seek for true goodness rather than greatness. Those who possess the mind of Christ
will have humble views of themselves. They will labor for the purity and prosperity of the
church, and be ready to sacrifice their own interests and desires rather than to cause dissension
among their brethren.

Satan is constantly seeking to cause distrust, alienation, and malice among Gods people. We
shall be often tempted to feel that our rights are invaded, when there is no real cause for such
feelings. Those whose love for self is stronger than their love for Christ and His cause will
place their own interests first and resort to almost any expedient to guard and maintain them.
When they consider themselves injured by their brethren, some will even go to law instead of
following the Saviours rule. Even many who appear to be conscientious Christians are
hindered by pride and self-esteem from going privately to those they think in error, that they
may talk the matter over in the spirit of Christ and pray for one another. Contentions, strife, and lawsuits between brethren are a disgrace to the cause of truth. Those who take such a course expose the church to the ridicule of her enemies and cause the powers of darkness to triumph. They are piercing the wounds of Christ afresh and putting Him to an open shame. By ignoring the authority of the church they show contempt for God, Who gave to the church its authority.

Paul writes to the Galatians: "I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:12-16).

Opening Church Difficulties to Unbelievers. When troubles arise in the church we should not go for help to lawyers not of our faith. God does not desire us to open church difficulties before those who do not fear Him. He would not have us depend for help on those who do not obey His requirements. Those who trust in such counselors show that they have not faith in God. By their lack of faith the Lord is greatly dishonored, and their course works great injury to themselves. In appealing to unbelievers to settle difficulties in the church they are biting and devouring one another, to be "consumed one of another" (Galatians 5:15).

These men cast aside the counsel God has given, and do the very things He has bidden them not to do. They show that they have chosen the world as their judge, and in Heaven their names are registered as one with unbelievers. Christ is crucified afresh, and put to open shame. Let these men know that God does not hear their prayers. They insult His holy name, and He will leave them to the buffetings of Satan until they shall see their folly and seek the Lord by confession of their sin.

Matters connected with the church are to be kept within its own borders. If a Christian is abused, he is to take it patiently; if defrauded, he is not to appeal to courts of justice. Rather let him suffer loss and wrong.

God will deal with the unworthy church member who defrauds his brother or the cause of God; the Christian need not contend for his rights. God will deal with the one who violates these rights. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). An account is kept of all these matters, and for all the Lord declares that He will avenge. He will bring every work into Judgment. Selected Messages, bk. 3, pp. 299, 300.

Unsafe Counselors. The interests of the cause of God are not to be committed to men who have no connection with Heaven. Those who are disloyal to God cannot be safe counselors. They have not that wisdom which comes from above. They are not to be trusted to pass judgment in matters connected with God's cause, matters upon which such great results depend. If we follow their judgment, we shall surely be brought into very difficult places, and shall retard the work of God.

Those who are not connected with God are connected with the enemy of God, and while they may be honest in the advice they give, they themselves are blinded and deceived. Satan puts suggestions into the mind and words into the mouth that are entirely contrary to the mind and will of God. Thus he works through them to allure us into false paths. He will mislead, entangle, and ruin us if he can.

Anciently it was a great sin for the people of God to give themselves away to the enemy, and open before them either their perplexity or their prosperity. Under the ancient economy it was a sin to offer sacrifice upon the wrong altar. It was a sin to offer incense kindled by the wrong fire.

We are in danger of mingling the sacred and the common. The holy fire from God is to be used in our efforts. The true altar is Christ; the true fire is the Holy Spirit. This is our inspiration. It is only as the Holy Spirit leads and guides a man that he is a safe counselor. If we turn aside from
God and from His chosen ones to inquire at strange altars we shall be answered according to our works.

Let us show perfect trust in our Leader. Let us seek wisdom from the Fountain of wisdom. In every perplexing or trying situation, let Gods people agree as touching the thing they desire, and then let them unite in offering prayer to God, and persevere in asking for the help they need. We are to acknowledge God in all our counsel, and when we ask of Him, we are to believe that we receive the very blessings sought. Undated Manuscript 112, in Selected Messages, bk. 3, pp. 300, 301.

Counsel to a Believer Threatening Lawsuits. When you engaged in that lawsuit against R, I said if S has gone so far as to enter into that business, it will be a blot upon his life. I have sorrowed because of your course in this; I know that it is not right, and will not in the least relieve the situation for you in any way. It is only a manifestation of that wisdom which is not from above.

I was informed that you intended to institute a suit against me, on the ground that you had been wronged by the testimonies given in your case. A letter came to me, threatening that if I did not acknowledge that I had wronged you, the suit would be entered upon. Now, I could hardly believe that you had gone so decidedly on the enemy's ground, knowing my lifework as well as you do.

All that I have written to you, every word of it, was the truth. I have no retractions to make. I have done only that which I know to be my duty to do. My only motive in publishing the matter was the hope of saving you. I had no thought but of sincere pity and love for your soul. You yourself know that I have great interest for your soul. . . .

If anyone shall seek to hinder me in this work by appealing to the law, I shall not abate one jot of the testimonies given. The work in which I am engaged is not my work. It is the work of God, which He has given me to do. I did not believe that you would do so terrible a thing as to lift your finite hand against the God of Heaven. Whoever shall do this work, let it not be you.

I want to say to you, Do not extort money from anyone because of words spoken against you or yours. You harm yourself by so doing. If we are looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, we shall be able to pray, "Lord, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Jesus did not appeal to the law for redress when He was unjustly accused. When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He was threatened, He did not retaliate. Letter 38, 1891, in Selected Messages, bk. 3, pp. 301, 302.

The Very Thing God Told Them Not to Do. I have written largely in regard to Christians who believe the truth placing their cases in courts of law to obtain redress. In doing this, they are biting and devouring one another in every sense of the word, "to be consumed one of another." They cast aside the inspired counsel God has given, and in the face of the message He gives they do the very thing He has told them not to do. Such men may as well stop praying to God, for He will not hear their prayers. They insult Jehovah, and He will leave them to become the subjects of Satan until they shall see their folly and seek the Lord by confession of their sins.

What Appeals to the Courts Reveal. The world and unconverted church members are in sympathy. Some when God reproves them for wanting their own way, make the world their confidence, and bring church matters before the world for decision. Then there is collision and strife, and Christ is crucified afresh, and put to open shame. Those church members who appeal to the courts of the world show that they have chosen the world as their judge, and their names are registered in Heaven as one with unbelievers. How eagerly the world seizes the statements of those who betray sacred trusts!

This action, of appealing to human courts, never before entered into by Seventh-day Adventists, has now been done. God has permitted this that you who have been deceived may understand what power is controlling those who have had entrusted to them great responsibilities. Where are Gods sentinels? Where are the men who will stand shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, with the truth, present truth for this time, in possession of the heart?
Manuscript 64, 1898, in Selected Messages, bk. 3, pp. 302, 303.

**The Saints to Judge the World.** The saints are to judge the world. Then are they to depend upon the world, and upon the worlds lawyers to settle their difficulties? God does not want them to take their troubles to the subjects of the enemy for decision. Let us have confidence in one another. Manuscript 71, 1903, in Selected Messages, bk. 3, p. 303.

**Lawyers and Laodiceans.** To lean upon the arm of the law is a disgrace to Christians; yet this evil has been brought in and cherished among the Lords chosen people. Worldly principles have been stealthily introduced, until in practice many of our workers are becoming like the Laodiceanshalf-hearted, because so much dependence is placed on lawyers and legal documents and agreements. Such a condition of things is abhorrent to God. Manuscript 128, 1903, in Selected Messages, bk. 3, p. 303.

**A Lawsuit Against the Publishing House.** "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more the things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians 6:1-9) When church members have this knowledge, their practice will be of a character to recommend their faith. By a well-ordered life, and godly conversation, they will reveal Christ. There will be no lawsuits between neighbors or brothers.

I call upon you in the name of Christ to withdraw the suit that you have begun and never bring another into court. God forbids you thus to dishonor His name. You have had great light and many opportunities, and you cannot afford to unite with worldlings and follow their methods. Remember that the Lord will treat you according to the stand that you take in this life.

I tell you solemnly that if you take the action which you now purpose to take, you will never recover from the result of it. If you open before the world the wrongs that you suppose your brethren have done you, there will be some things that will have to be said on the other side. I have a caution to give you.

In regard to the case of those who shared large responsibilities with you in the Review and Herald, and who have turned to be enemies of the work, you will not wish to hear the verdict that shall be passed upon them when the Judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened, and every man shall be judged according to the things written in the books. I want to save you from following a course that would link you up with those who have linked themselves up with fallen angels, to do all the harm they possibly can to those who love God, and who, under great difficulty, are striving to proclaim present truth to the world.

**The Publishing House Not Blameless.** Those against whom you bring your charges know that I have not approved of their manner of dealing with you, and that I have reproved them for their unfeeling management of your case. There are those who have not acted honorably. They have not done as they would be done by. But because of this, should you, in the face of the warnings given, move so manifestly against the instruction given? I beg of you not to cut yourself off from the confidence of your brethren and from taking a part in the publishing work.

I would rather share your loss than to have you push this matter through to the injury of your soul, giving Satan an opportunity to present your case before unbelievers in a most ridiculous light, and to hold up the office of publication in a disparaging light.

**Gods Cause Injured.** Take this case out of the lawyers hands. It seems awful to me to think...
that you will go directly contrary to the plain Word of God, and will open to the world your cruel work against God's commandment-keeping people. If this action of yours were to tell only against those who have done injustice, the harm would not be so far-reaching; but can you not see that it will arouse prejudice against God's people as a body? Thus you will bruise and wound Christ in the person of His saints, and cause Satan to exult because through you he could work against God's people and against His institutions, doing them great harm. Letter 301, 1905, in *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, pp. 303-305.