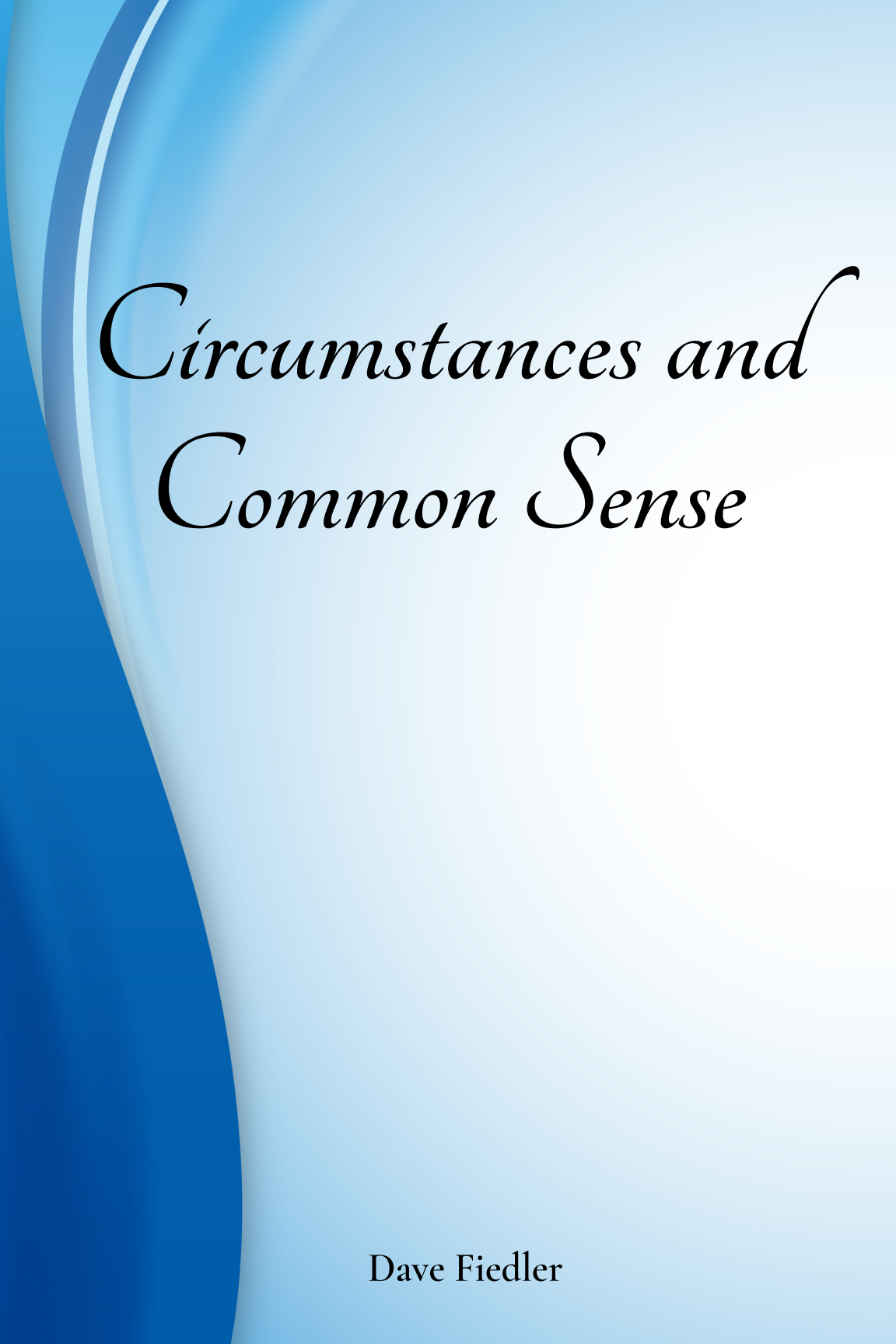


The background of the cover is a light blue gradient. On the left side, there is a dark blue vertical band. A white, curved, swoosh-like shape starts from the top left and curves downwards towards the bottom left, creating a sense of motion or a stylized 'C' shape.

Circumstances and Common Sense

Dave Fiedler

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dfiedler@AdventistCityMissions.org

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Circumstances and Common Sense

I want to address the recent agitation over the matter of tithing, but I'm going to begin, by way of introduction, with a little story. Full disclosure: some of the details here are about as literally true as the conversation between the rich man and "Father Abraham."

1. Blame It on Geometry

Doctrinal discussions, debates, arguments, and the like often remind me of advanced Geometry. That may not make sense, but hear me out because Geometry is what really put "Greek Education" on the map, and that system still influences us today. I should mention that its influence isn't always a plus.

So it works like this. Someone looks at a theological topic and says, "I've got this all figured out. I can illustrate it with a square, and I know how to calculate the exact area of a square, and it works every time because I've got this nifty formula. All I have to do is measure one edge of the square, and then multiply that value by itself." ($A = a^2$)¹

And he's right. It works every time, in theory anyway. Admittedly, there aren't very many gardens (or anything else) that are exact squares, but the formula works great.

1. Thanks to René Descartes, "A" is the symbol for "area," because capital letters are used to denote the final calculated properties of a shape, and "a" is the symbol for the known value of the square's side.

But someone else says, “Actually, you’re making too much of the issue. You don’t need a whole square. What you need is the formula for the area of a triangle. It’s $\frac{1}{2}b \cdot h$.”²

And the great thing is that that formula works perfectly, too. If only the lines in the real world were all exactly straight... well, why fuss over details? The formula is absolutely accurate.

Then a couple other, more learned theologians come on the scene, both of whom say that the whole discussion is ridiculously over-simplified. “What you’re missing is the added dimension of it all,” they say in unison. But then one explains that the only right approach is to calculate the *volume* of a cube... which isn’t all that hard, so he’s promoting $V=a^3$.³ The other guy argues for a nice tetrahedron as the preferred answer (after all, it’s the simplest three dimensional object anywhere in the three dimensional parts of the universe), and he’s got a formula, too: $V=\frac{a^3}{6\sqrt{2}}$

Wow! That’s really great, because those formulas are just as fool-proof as the other ones we’ve looked at! They work every time, and that last one, especially, looks pretty impressive. Ain’t it wonderful what the human brain can do! Theology sure is fun!

But the guy with the cube isn’t giving up. “OK, so I’ll accept your pyramid idea, but it has to have four sides. Your tetrahedron (a pyramid with a triangular base) really misses this whole aspect over here, so what we really need is a square pyramid. And the good news is, I’ve got a formula for that.” $V=a^2 \cdot \frac{h}{3}$ works perfectly—and it has the added advantage of a little Egyptian vibe to go with the Greek education. There’s nothing worse than in-bred theology.

Well, this little tale could go on quite a while like this, but for the sake of time and space, let’s jump on down the list to a good old fashioned soccer ball. That’s what I might call it, though in much of the world it would be a “football,” but in the world of Geometry its called a regular truncated icosahedron. And—you guessed it—there’s a formula to calculate the volume of such things. You probably already know this, but for those who aren’t quite up to speed, the formula is $V=\frac{125+43 \cdot \sqrt{5}}{4} \cdot a^3$. This was such an elegant solution to the problem that there really couldn’t be any further argument... until God joined in. At that point, the conversation went something like this:

“You’ve done some really fine work with all those formulas. I’m proud of you.”

2. “b” is the base of the triangle, and “h” is the height of the opposite angle.

3. “V” is for volume.

"Well, that's very generous of You to say that, but of course all the ability came from You in the first place."

"Yes, that's true, but talents are entrusted to servants so they can be put to use, and you all did that. Well done!"

This comment was perplexing to most, if not all, of the theologians, and at length one of the most learned ventured to ask for an explanation. "Lord," he said, "I'm confused. You see all our various definitions and illustrations; You certainly recognize the difference between a two-dimensional 'area,' and a three-dimensional 'volume'; and yet You commend us *all*? Surely some distinction should be made as to the quality of our work."

"Yes," the Lord said, "I wanted to talk about that, too. Those of you who saw more depth to the question were certainly headed in the right direction. And yet, knowing as I do each of your backgrounds, the amount and nature of the light you've been blessed with, the intellectual aptitude entrusted to each, and the different experiences you've all lived through—in the light of all that, I'm pleased with each of you. True, there were deficiencies in all your work, but this is to be expected in the process of 'progressive revelation.' I went to a lot of trouble figuring out how to unfold the plan of salvation in a way that made sure the light available to each one all the way down through history, was sufficient to save that soul. *That* was a complicated matter, let Me tell you!"

That last comment didn't register much with any of the theologians. They were still puzzling over the idea that God hadn't condemned all the obviously wrong formulas and the misguided folks who had promoted them. It was a conundrum, but eventually the one with most complicated formula decided it was time for a victory lap.

"So it is 'volume,' not just 'area.' I *knew it!*" he said. "So was I right? Was the regular truncated icosahedron the best model? Was my formula right? I mean, I *know* it was right, humanly speaking, but I would love to know how You see it, Lord."

"Yes, that was an elegant formula. Very precise, given its constraints."

"Constraints? Lord, I don't know of any constraints. That formula works on every truncated icosahedron, anywhere in the universe... doesn't it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed it does... as long as every edge line is perfectly straight and exactly the same length as all the others, and all the angles are accurate down to the sub-atomic level. I'm sure it would work just fine."

"*Would* work, Lord?"

"Yes, I'm sure it would."

"But surely it *does* work. It has to work. Mathematics and geometry both prove that it works."

"Yes, of course, mathematics and geometry are wonderfully precise, so I'm certain that if I ever did create that kind of perfectly regular truncated icosahedron,

your formula would fit it exactly. It's just that My creation is both infinitely *precise*, and infinitely *varied*. You'd be surprised how important those little variations are when it comes to things like cosmology and the placement of electrons."

"But the theology, Lord.... It all pointed to the volume of a truncated icosahedron. Didn't it? I'm right, aren't I?"

"You're as right as could be expected, given your circumstances. But in the final analysis, the theology is actually more complex than that."

"More complex? How much more complex can it get?"

"Well, the theology is best represented by volume, but there's very little in My creation—including most theology—that is bound about by perfectly straight lines and that kind of theoretical precision. Instead, I've designed it to meet the actual need of each situation... and that's often kind of complicated."

"But 'volume' is a simple idea. We just need to know the shape of it."

"Right."

"So how hard can it be? What shape are we talking about?"

"Do you see that great big, billowy cloud up there? The one that looks like five million different sized cotton balls piled up on the ground, and it's dark enough to produce some actual rain. (You do realize you need some rain, don't you?) I'd love to show all of you the formula for the volume of that cloud, but first I think we should talk about some of the things you said about each other."

That's the end of my story. Far too wordy and much too geeky to be a classic like Jesus' "Rich Man and Lazarus," but perhaps it will help make my point.

2. *Variability is a Feature, Not a Bug*

There's been a bit of a discussion recently about tithing. Generally, that's a simple enough topic, but just now it's become a kind of hot-button flash point. It's not the first time, and it probably won't be the last, so circumstances and details may change, but with a little common sense you should be able to figure out how the basic principles apply.

At the moment, a prominent pastor with years of mission service, a much broader than usual grasp of history, and a record for technical accuracy, very strongly recommended that church members not pay tithe through the "regular channels."⁴ This course of action was described as a way to register concerns about efforts within the Adventist Church to encourage social conformity to

4. This is something of a historic term in Adventism. A century and more ago, there were two closely related terms: "regular lines" and "regular channels." The former referred to the administrative "chain of command" within the church, while the latter was applied to the systems and mechanisms used to gather and distribute church funds. We don't use these terms much any more, with most emphasis of that sort having shifted over to discussion of the "storehouse" concept.

non-Biblical perspectives (e.g., matters of personal identity, trans-sexual and homosexual practices, and the establishment of precedent in which the Church assumes the authority to define the limits of personal conscience).

In response, a number of Adventist members who are prominent in their own right through their positions in the denomination and/or various “independent” internet channels have raised concerns with this approach. They are uncomfortable with the “strong arm” nature of the tactic, and some have cited Spirit of Prophecy comments to support the idea that the believer’s responsibility to “bring all the tithes into the storehouse” is fully met by submitting an honest tithe through the normal channels of Church finance. Some individuals would say that there was in fact no way to “pay an honest tithe” through any other channel, because the Church’s financial system is the *only* “storehouse.”

I wouldn’t presume to say whether these positions correspond to a two-dimensional area or a three-dimensional volume. That whole notion is a bit “out there” in the first place, so please leave it in the “heavily metaphorical, for illustrative purposes only” department. What I would say is that there are reasons to look beyond either of those options.⁵ And, specifically, I would go looking into the variability aspect of God’s leading.

Catch the wording I just used: the “variability aspect of God’s leading.” That’s an important idea, but it may sound odd at first. Maybe even heretical.

Why, and how, could a God who “changes not” incorporate “variability” into His work? At first look it seems ridiculous. After all, the book of James speaks of the “Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” That’s about as direct a refutation as one could ask for, no?

Actually, no. The full verse reads like this: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”⁶ It’s the “good” and “perfect” quality of the gifts that never changes, not the gifts themselves. The Bible abounds with examples of differing gifts.

“And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.”⁷

“Jesus said to him, ‘If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?’”⁸

5. Indeed, I would say there are reasons to look beyond the whole topic of tithe. Truth be told, I’m not as interested in the tithe question as I am in the underlying principles, and the misunderstanding of those principles which ensure that the argument will continue endlessly without resolution. Tithing is not unique in this; it just happens to make the best “vehicle” for illustrating the more substantial issues.

6. James 1:17

7. Matthew 25:15

8. John 21:22

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."⁹

When God makes clouds, they don't come as cubes or tetrahedra. I'd be hard put to prove it, I suppose, but I'm willing to guess that there have probably never been two identical clouds. Seriously, if you can believe a claim like that about snowflakes, how could you argue with me over clouds?¹⁰

All have not the same work to do; different circumstances and talents qualify individuals for different kinds of work in God's vineyard. There are some who fill more responsible positions than do others; but to each one is given his work, and if he does his work with fidelity and zeal, he is a faithful steward of the grace of God.¹¹

So maybe the radical claim that God leads His people as individuals, with a fair amount of variation between one life and the next, is not quite enough to excommunicate me. But I'll go further, and say that what was perfectly good counsel at one point might not be good in another time or place. This isn't really rocket science, but I am applying this to inspired material, so it deserves some pretty serious intellectual rigor. If you're already convinced, skip ahead a bit, or just bear with me because that's the polite thing to do.

3. *Rigorous Proceedings*

Let's start with this: Ellen White once famously advised the full 1899 General Conference session to "Shun the incurring of debt as you would shun leprosy." Pretty good counsel, I'd say, but not writ in stone like as if it was an addition to the Ten Commandments. How do I know? Because of what she said five years later:

The idea that you must never move unless you have the means in your hand has often held us back. That is my principle, but I say, Circumstances alter cases. When

9. 1 Corinthians 12:4–11

10. While I'm happy enough to believe that no two snowflakes are exactly the same, I've always thought that the observed sample size represents a rather small percentage of the total number of snowflakes throughout history. There aren't many arenas in which we would consider it to be sufficiently representative. The same argument could be brought against my claim in regard to clouds, I suppose. Perhaps it is best to stress that we're talking about a metaphor.

11. *Review and Herald*, October 16, 1888

there is a work that must be carried on, we must push the battle to the gates. We cannot always afford to wait to see the means in our hands.¹²

This habit of adopting a single, unvarying, fixed position seems to have been getting on her nerves a bit that year. Notice the similar thought in this slightly earlier setting, but also in 1904:

When I heard what the objections were, that the children could not go to school till they were ten years old, I wanted to tell you that there was not a Sabbathkeeping school when the light was given to me that the children should not attend school until they were old enough to be instructed. They should be taught at home to know what proper manners were when they went to school, and not be led astray. The wickedness carried on in the common schools is almost beyond conception.

That is how it is, and my mind has been greatly stirred in regard to the idea, "Why, Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so; and therefore we are going right up to it."

God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.¹³

Common sense does seem like a good thing. We use it all the time (hopefully) in everyday life, but there is a special quality about religious matters that can sometimes make us willing to go against our own common sense. Clearly, that's not always a bad thing! Building big boats on dry land and marching around fortified cities are just a couple of examples where stock item common sense might have suggested a less successful alternative plan! When God says, "Do this," it's proper to let faith overrule common sense.

The trick comes in knowing the difference between "Always do this," "This time, do this," and "This is a special case, so I want you to do something that defies all normal logic because that's the best way in this situation, right now."

Why doesn't God just make up His mind and leave it at that? Why not just pick the right thing to do and tell us?

Circumstances. That's why. Because "circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things." Seriously, it's not brain surgery! Why don't people always use umbrellas? Because it isn't always raining! Why don't they always wear parkas? Because it isn't always cold. How complicated is that?

I do hope you thought to yourself, "Yeah, that's kind of simple, really." But let's not over-sell anything, because the devil is working full-time to complicate everything, and there are few strategies better than getting bad people to cite a good idea in support of their wickedness.

12. E.G. White, "Sermon at Middletown, Connecticut," September 4, 1904; Manuscript 155, 1904

13. E.G. White, "Interview: Counsel on Age of School Entrance," January 14, 1904; Manuscript 7, 1904

Often the professed followers of Christ are found with hearts hardened and eyes blinded, because they do not obey the truth. Selfish motives and purposes take possession of the mind. In their self-confidence they suppose that their way is the way of wisdom. They are not particular to follow the path that God has marked out. *They declare that circumstances alter cases*, and when Satan tempts them to follow worldly principles, they yield, and making crooked paths for their feet, they lead others astray. The inexperienced follow where they go, supposing that the judgment of Christians so experienced must be wise.¹⁴

Here's the take-away truth: Circumstances *do* alter cases, and generally common sense is a worthwhile tool in the evaluation of those circumstances, but there is danger the moment "selfish motives" and "self-confidence" get involved. The kind of variability that comes from thinking, "My way is the way of wisdom," is "a crooked path," while the less common, divinely directed kind of variability is the only safe way to go.

4. *Have We Lost the Path?*

You may be asking how all that has anything to do with tithe. Well, "all that" is connected to the tithe issue primarily because "all that" is the way God actually works with His church, including the matter of tithe. We can see that clearly in this excerpt from a letter Ellen White wrote to the president of the Colorado Conference.

I send this matter to you so that you shall not make a mistake. *Circumstances alter cases*. I would not advise that any one should make a practice of gathering up tithe money. But for years there have now and then been persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe who have placed their tithe in my hands and said that if I did not take it they would themselves appropriate it to the families of the most needy ministers they could find. I have taken the money, given a receipt for it, and told them how it was appropriated.

I write this to you so that you shall keep cool and not become stirred up and give publicity to this matter, lest many more shall follow their example.¹⁵

This, of course, is the famous "Watson Letter" which has figured so prominently in pretty much every discussion or argument about tithe for the last century and more. The story behind the letter is interesting and informative, but at the moment let's just notice that second sentence: "Circumstances alter cases." Right here in the "central document" (it really shouldn't be, but it generally is) of the whole discussion.

14. E.G. White, "Instruction to the Churches," October 31, 1902; Manuscript 135, 1902, italics added

15. E.G. White, Letter to G.F. Watson, January 22, 1905; Letter 267, 1905, italics added

SIDEBAR: THE WATSON LETTER

Elder Watson,

My brother, I wish to say to you, Be careful how you move. You are not moving wisely. The least you have to speak about the tithe that has been appropriated to the most needy and the most discouraging field in the world, the more sensible you will be.

It has been presented to me for years that my tithe was to be appropriated by myself to aid the white and colored ministers who were neglected and did not receive sufficient properly to support their families. When my attention was called to aged ministers, white or black, it was my special duty to investigate into their necessities and supply their needs. This was to be my special work, and I have done this in a number of cases. No man should give notoriety to the fact that in special cases the tithe is used in that way.

In regard to the colored work in the South, that field has been and is still being robbed of the means that should come to the workers in that field. If there have been cases where our sisters have appropriated their tithe to the support of the ministers' working for the colored people in the South, let every man, if he is wise, hold his peace.

I have myself appropriated my tithe to the most needy cases brought to my notice. I have been instructed to do this; and as the money is not withheld from the Lord's treasury, it is not a matter that should be commented upon; for it will necessitate my making known these matters, which I do not desire to do, because it is not best.

Some cases have been kept before me for years, and I have supplied their needs from the tithe, as God has instructed me to do. And if any person shall say to me, Sister White, will you appropriate my tithe where you know it is most needed, I shall say, Yes, I will; and I have done so. I commend those sisters who have placed their tithe where it is most needed to help to do a work that is being left undone; and if this matter is given publicity, it will create a knowledge which would better be left as it is. I do not care to give publicity to this work which the Lord has appointed me to do and others to do.

I send this matter to you so that you shall not make a mistake. Circumstances alter cases. I would not advise that any one should make a practice of gathering up tithe money. But for years there have now and then been persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe who have placed their tithe in my hands and said that if I did not take it they would themselves appropriate it to the families of the most needy ministers they could find. I have taken the money, given a receipt for it, and told them how it was appropriated.

I write this to you so that you shall keep cool and not become stirred up and give publicity to this matter, lest many more shall follow their example.¹⁶

16. E.G. White, Letter to G.F. Watson, January 22, 1905; Letter 267, 1905

Now, there are a couple different “circumstances” that deserve our consideration. The first of these, I would think, is that Ellen White is describing something that she herself did. I’d say it’s fair to note that the course of action followed by one blessed with the prophetic gift is not necessarily always going to be the model for the rest of us. That’s a “circumstance” which is a part of this story, and it should not be lost sight of.

The second thing worth noting is that this practice distributing others’ tithe was only a “now and then” thing. Not “all the time.” That’s also worth noting.

The third circumstance that stands out is the one she probably had in mind as case altering: None of this happened at all unless there was someone who had “lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe.” We would hope this was a fairly rare occurrence, but it is undeniably the initial trigger which put all the rest into play.

When that happened it created a special case. Those circumstances had changed the landscape, and so she did what she would not normally do. She provided an alternative channel for the distribution of the concerned church member’s tithe. The key factor in the church member’s mind, of course, is that this alternative channel appeared more worthy of “confidence.”

What she said about herself was just an illustration of the principles involved in such cases. It was meant to make it easier to know what to do in a different unusual circumstance that had raised concerns in Elder Watson’s mind. When it came to direct advice, she encouraged Elder Watson to “keep cool and not become stirred up and give publicity to this matter.” Why? “Lest many more shall follow their example.”

That final comment paints an interesting picture. First, and likely foremost, it tells me that she didn’t want to encourage that approach to tithe paying. For one thing, it would have been an onerous burden for her to take on the obligation of distributing tithe funds and writing receipts for everyone who might wish her to. That wasn’t her calling; that’s why we have treasurers and finance committees.

Secondly, it indicates that there was a credible concern that “many” might well be feeling less than perfectly confident “in the appropriation of the tithe.” They weren’t to the point of feeling compelled to give it “to the families of the most needy ministers they could find,” but they were perhaps not completely satisfied with the status quo. Shown a different option, they just might take it. That sounds a lot like the way normal people think and behave. Not too mysterious.

The passage as a whole implicitly indicates one additional point: there is no mention here of Ellen White condemning, rebuking, or correcting the church member who had “lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe.”

Some who have looked into this matter previously may be quick to say, “But she definitely did on another occasion!” And they would be right... sort of.

5. *The Better Way*

We need to look at the letter. It comes with a strong recommendation from Ellen White, that the recipient consider something different, something better, than what was originally intended. Since “‘something better’ is the watchword of education, the law of all true living,”¹⁷ it certainly deserves our attention. Here it is:

A long time ago I received your letter enclosing a draft for \$100. Twenty-five dollars of this you say is a thank-offering to be used in carrying forward the work in some needy place. As you have requested, I shall use it where, according to my best judgment, it is most needed. The reward of whole-souled liberality is the leading of mind and soul and heart to a closer fellowship with the Spirit.

You ask if I will accept tithe from you and use it in the cause of God where most needed. In reply I will say that I shall not refuse to do this, but at the same time I will tell you that there is a better way.

It is better to put confidence in the ministers of the conference where you live and in the officers of the church where you worship. Draw nigh to your brethren. Love them with a true heart fervently, and encourage them to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God.¹⁸

Why, we might ask, did Ellen White not say something of this sort in the Watson letter? I suspect we’ve already seen the answer: “Circumstances alter cases.” This letter was written to a good sister in the church who lived in Fargo, North Dakota, and her situation was significantly different from that of Elder Watson. In fact, a review of those details is quite helpful when it comes to understanding this letter, so let’s take a look at that before circling back to other matters.

6. *Sorting Out Sister Lucy*

For starters, on page 397 of the penultimate volume of Arthur White’s monumental biography of his grandmother, this letter is mistakenly described as written to “a certain veteran colporteur” by the name of Walter Harper. Brother Harper also sent tithe funds to Ellen White on occasion¹⁹ so the confusion is understandable. Given the thousands of citations provided in that series of books, a single mistake should be quickly and graciously forgiven.

17. *Education*, 297

18. E.G. White, Letter to Sister J.J. Gravelle, December 29, 1911; Letter 96, 1911

19. See section 16.

Still, Walter Harper was a vastly different character than the actual recipient of the “better way” letter. Her name was Lucy J. Gravelle, and although she signed her letters as Mrs. J.F. Gravelle,²⁰ Ellen and W.C. White both addressed their letters to her as “J.J.”²¹ It appears to have been a clerical error from a misreading of the “F” initial that somehow stayed with her “file” in the Elmhaven office. Or could it have been a nickname? That seems unlikely, given the customs of the era.²²

Mrs. Gravelle and her husband were not your average church members. Frank Gravelle became quite involved with church work, starting in 1890. His resume, gleaned from the *Review and Herald*, denominational *Yearbooks*, *General Conference Bulletins*, and the local conference *Northern Union Reaper*, is impressive. He filled positions on the Camp meeting committee and the Sabbath School Association nominating committee in 1890.

The next year, he was a busy man, with positions on the Dakota Conference Executive committee, Camp meeting committee, Conference nominating committee, Tract and Missionary Society nominating committee, Sabbath School Association nominating committee, as well as serving as the Tract and Missionary Society District Director. In light of all this (and who knows what all else) he was recognized as a Licensed Missionary. We don’t use quite the same terminology these days, but it’s worth noting that that was a paid position. It was more or less equivalent to what we might call a Bible Worker, but with a more general scope of territorial authority and activity rather than being an employee of a single congregation.

He continued working in similar positions until he was granted a Ministerial License in 1897. By late 1898 he was asked to work in Manitoba, and in recognition of the effort she had been putting into all this activity, Lucy was hired as a Licensed Missionary and asked to work more formally along with her husband.²³

20. Her husband’s name was “J. Frank Gravelle,” so her signature simply reflects her married status as Frank’s wife.

21. All the letters from Ellen and Willie address her as “J.J. Gravelle,” whereas the one letter written by Sara McEnterfer (on Ellen White’s behalf) addresses her as “Mrs. J.F. Gravelle.”

22. Even in our less formal age, nicknames are generally used by close friends or acquaintances, and I haven’t found any strong evidence of that much connection between the Gravelles and the Whites. The one link that may have been the basis for such a relationship is that Frank Gravelle was baptized by James White in 1874. *Review and Herald*, July 11, 1918. Mrs. Gravelle’s signature at the close of a letter she wrote Ellen White May 10, 1912, shows a clear difference between the “J” and the “F,” but it is subtle and might have been misread.



23. A Licensed Missionary might be thought of as something akin to a “Bible Worker Plus.” At the time, this was the same status as that held by Mrs. G.A. Irwin, the General Conference presidents wife, as well as C.C. Crisler, Georgia Burrus, Abram LaRue, and a host of other less well known names.

In 1900, the Director of the Manitoba Mission Field, Andrew Nelson, reported that he had “visited Killarney, where Brother Gravelle has been holding meetings for about eight months.... We organized a church, consisting of fourteen believers. This church is the fruit of the labors of Brother and Sister Gravelle.”²⁴

But soon, it was time for the Gravelles to move on—

April 12, 1900, we moved from Killarney to Morden, to help build up the good work in this place. Here is the home of Elder H.J. Dirksen, one of our German ministers. He has done much faithful work here, and several Germans have accepted the truth. The time had come to labor for the English people; and as the brethren here had no place in which to hold meetings, except a private house, we rented a church building. The meetings began with a fair attendance, and one person accepted the truth.

Our camp-meeting, which began July 1, added much to the interest of the work here. Elders Morrison, Hoopes, and Wilkinson, and Brother Graff gave much valuable instruction. The attendance was good, and the last day of the meeting there were nearly one thousand persons on the grounds. A number took their stand for the truth. After the camp-meeting we kept our large tent standing for six weeks. Elder Nelson, director of the mission field, Elders Buhalts and Dirksen, and a number of Bible workers remained to help in the good work. About the middle of August the most of the laborers were obliged to leave, only my wife and I being left to carry on the work. As a result of the effort since camp-meeting several have taken their stand for the truth, and the church at Morden now has fifty-two members. Several young persons are in the truth, but have not yet united with the church. The brethren here have built a new church, twenty by thirty-six feet, and have it nearly all paid for.²⁵

In 1902, health challenges—“due to the severe climate of Manitoba and the quality of the water”—led the Gravelles to leave Manitoba and settle in Fargo, North Dakota.²⁶ Frank continued as a licensed minister until at least 1905, but Lucy seems to have ended her denominational employment at this time.

That’s not to say they were no longer active in the Church, however, for the record continues to provide glimpses such as these:

Brother Frank J. Gravelle spoke with great freedom the second Sabbath, on the “Triumph of the Sabbath,” before a large and highly interested congregation, many fine thoughts being brought out through the “Spirit of Prophecy.”²⁷

Friday evening Elder Gravelle spoke in the tent on “The Change of the Sabbath.” The spirit of the Lord was present and four gave their hearts to Him.²⁸

24. *Review and Herald*, March 6, 1900

25. *Review and Herald*, January 29, 1901. To add one more touch of confusion to the name issue, this brief report is signed “J.J. Gravelle,” despite the “my wife and I” comment. Could “J.J.” have been some sort of joint designation for both of them?

26. *Review and Herald*, July 29, 1902

27. *West Michigan Herald*, April 8, 1908. It just seems like no one can get the Gravelles’ names straight! I don’t know what the “J” stood for, but it definitely came before “Frank.”

28. *West Michigan Herald*, July 22, 1908

Elders Wilbur and Gravelle are holding meetings at the Soldiers' Home in Grand Rapids, on Saturday evenings. There seems to be a good interest.²⁹

A well filled house listened to some very interesting remarks presented by Elder S.A. Ruskjer of Minneapolis.... the secretary of the Home Missionary Department of the Northern Union Conference. While in town, Elder Ruskjer was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. J.F. Gravelle.³⁰

The ladies of the Seventh-day Adventist church of this city met at the home of Mrs. J.F. Gravelle, Wednesday afternoon, the affair being in honor of Mrs. Frank Corson, who expects to leave Fargo Friday morning to make her future home in St. Paul. The afternoon was very pleasantly spent in an informal social way, and at 5 o'clock a bountiful repast was served³¹

Sister J.F. Gravelle, so well known in the North Dakota, South Dakota, Michigan, and Manitoba Conferences, one of the standbys of the Fargo, N.D., church, has successfully passed through a very critical operation at the Harvey, N.D., Sanitarium, by Dr. R.C. Reimche, and is back to Fargo, making a good recovery.³²

At Fargo Sabbath, December 15,... a quintet of young girls led by Sister Gravelle rendered two beautiful selections very sweetly. I told the church that they have an excellent choir in embryo in these developing young members.

Brother Gravelle is the superintendent of the Sabbath school.³³

On December 11 we met at the home of Sister Gravelle to prepare the things for shipment [to help "our southern schools"]. We packed two boxes, measuring about 2 × 2½ × 1 ft., to go by freight. The girls had dressed a number of dolls and made a number of fine postcard books. Other articles sent were clothes, shoes, bandages, buttons, books, soap, pictures, post cards, toys, pencils, and various other things. Brother and Sister Gravelle deserve thanks for the use of their home, for furnishing boxes and taking them to the depot....

Sabbath, December 29, the church at this place enjoyed a very interesting program given by the young people. The subject was "The Publishing Work in the Asiatic Division." The young people had been well trained by Sister Gravelle. The needs of the Lord's work in the far East became apparent to all.³⁴

Along the way, the published record includes quite a number of occasions when Elder Gravelle conducted funeral services, and there are frequent mentions of significant generosity by both Elder and Mrs. Gravelle in the lists of donors for a variety of fund raising efforts. Taken together, the picture we get is a dedicated and well-connected couple who played many active roles in the church.

29. *Lake Union Herald*, December 16, 1908

30. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 22, 1916

31. *Northern Union Reaper*, October 24, 1916

32. *Northern Union Reaper*, June 5, 1917

33. *Northern Union Reaper*, December 18, 1917

34. *Northern Union Reaper*, January 22, 1918

Elder Gravelle “died on the camp ground at Harvey, N. Dakota, Sabbath morning, June 15,” 1918.³⁵

Lucy lived three-and-a-half more years, passing away December 28, 1921.

Mrs. Lucy Gravelle.... was united in marriage to Mr. J.F. Gravelle, July the 10th, 1876.³⁶ To this union three children were born, one son and two daughters. The husband and two of the children preceded her in death.

This faithful couple traveled the matrimonial life together forty-five years. A great deal of this time was spent in Gospel Evangelistic work, connected with the S.D.A. church of which Sister Gravelle was a life-long member. She served as Bible worker laboring with her husband in his ministerial work. Outside of Bible work she was an enthusiastic choir leader and musician, preaching many a Gospel Message in the songs she sung.

Failing health compelled both Elder and Mrs. Gravelle to give up gospel work which was carried on by them at Manitoba, Kearney, Morden, Winnipeg in Canada, and South Dakota. In the death of Sister Gravelle the church at Fargo has lost a faithful member and a loving friend. For a number of years she has served the church as treasurer, deaconess, and organist, and has given liberally to the cause of missions which she dearly loved.³⁷

7. *Given the circumstances....*

Now that we have Lucy Gravelle’s “circumstances” mapped out, we can go back to the “better way” letter and consider its message. Let’s take another look.

A long time ago I received your letter enclosing a draft for \$100. Twenty-five dollars of this you say is a thank-offering to be used in carrying forward the work in some needy place. As you have requested, I shall use it where, according to my best judgment, it is most needed. The reward of whole-souled liberality is the leading of mind and soul and heart to a closer fellowship with the Spirit.

You ask if I will accept tithe from you and use it in the cause of God where most needed. In reply I will say that I shall not refuse to do this, but at the same time I will tell you that there is a better way.

It is better to put confidence in the ministers of the conference where you live and in the officers of the church where you worship. Draw nigh to your brethren. Love them with a true heart fervently, and encourage them to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God.³⁸

35. *Review and Herald*, July 11, 1918. As merely a matter of interesting trivia, note the contrast between the somewhat more dignified *Review*, and the plain spoken original notice in the June 25, 1918, edition of the *Northern Union Reaper*: “Brother J. Frank Gravelle, of Fargo, N.D., dropped dead in the dining hall on the camp ground at Harvey, N.D., Sabbath morning, June 15.”

36. It makes no difference for our purposes, but it’s interesting to note that Frank’s obituary had their marriage in 1875. I have no idea which is correct.

37. *Northern Union Reaper*, January 31, 1922

38. E.G. White, Letter to Sister J.J. Gravelle, December 29, 1911; Letter 96, 1911

It's the last paragraph that deserves the most analysis. Ellen White told "J.J." that it would be better for her to "put confidence in the ministers of the conference where you live and in the officers of the church where you worship." What does this mean? Broadly speaking, I can think of two perspectives:

1. These words might easily be taken to mean, "Trust that what the ministers and church officers are doing is the right thing and help them do it without questioning."
2. But they might also be taken to mean, "Trust that the ministers and church officers are sincere and want to do the right thing."

The second sentence of that last paragraph encourages "J.J." to "Draw nigh to your brethren." What does this mean? Broadly speaking, I can think of two perspectives:

1. These words might easily be taken to mean, "Try to heal any hard feelings that your criticism of the pastors and church officers has caused."
2. But they might also be taken to mean, "Do all you can to get the pastors and church officers to trust you and respect your judgment."

The final sentence says "Love them with a true heart fervently, and encourage them to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God." What does this mean? Broadly speaking, I can think of two perspectives:

1. These words might easily be taken to mean, "Stop criticizing the pastors and encourage them in the good work they are doing."
2. But they might also be taken to mean, "Be patient with the pastors, but try to help them see what faithful service really is."

It doesn't take a degree in theology or psychology to see that there's quite a difference between "Option 1" and "Option 2." If we are going to gain anything from Ellen White's letter, we really need to start by understanding what she meant when she wrote to Sister Gravelle. Was it Option 1? Was it Option 2? Was it something somewhere in between? If we get that wrong, and then apply that understanding to all church members everywhere (regardless of the differences in circumstances) it would be hard to see much good coming from our efforts.

Right about now is a good time to remind ourselves of a quotation we looked at a few pages back.

All have not the same work to do; different circumstances and talents qualify individuals for different kinds of work in God's vineyard. There are some who fill more responsible positions than do others; but to each one is given his work, and if he does his work with fidelity and zeal, he is a faithful steward of the grace of God.³⁹

Given what we know about her background and circumstances, let's consider these two broad applications of the letter. Which scenario best fits Lucy Gravelle?

39. *Review and Herald*, October 16, 1888

Option 1 seems best designed for someone who may be sincere as can be, but is a bit critical, likely of matters outside their scope of responsibility. Simply put, their “circumstances and talents” don’t qualify them for the kind of work they are finding fault with. It would seem likely that this person has not only lost trust in the ministers and church officers over matters they really aren’t prepared to handle, but they may well have also said or done things that have caused the ministers and church officers to regard them as more of a problem or a challenge than a help.

There is a time and a place for non-pilots to just sit back and enjoy the flight rather than go pounding on the cockpit door with their concerns.

Option 2 seems best designed for someone with a good degree of experience, one whose “circumstances and talents” put them in a “more responsible position” than most. Their concerns may well be valid, but anyone who has ever tried correcting another person’s mistakes knows it isn’t always easy. The ones who are better at that job are the ones who have realized that they need to earn their credibility *before* they start trying to tell others what to do.

To build on the airplane analogy, let’s just say that pretty much any pilot anywhere would be willing to listen to advice from Chuck Yeager.⁴⁰

Which description sounds more like Ellen White’s view of Lucy Gravelle?

8. Wait! There’s more!

Before you try to decide if Ellen White’s letter fits Option 1 or Option 2—or maybe some percentage point along the continuum between them—there is a lot more evidence to consider.

If you were to simply read the “regularly published books” of Ellen White, you would only know about her one letter to J.J. Gravelle. That’s what we’ve already looked at.⁴¹ In the Manuscript Releases, you will find it quoted in four places, two of which highlight the tithe aspect, and one in which the letter as a whole is reproduced.⁴² But a little digging in the more recently available materials like the W.C. White Letterbooks and the Incoming Correspondence collection now available through the Ellen G. White Estate web site will reward you with five more letters to and from Sister Gravelle that help fill out the picture. Let’s go through the pertinent portions of these letters, in chronological sequence.

40. Chuck “the right stuff” Yeager became a legend as the first pilot to break the sound barrier at a time when many scientists believed it to be impossible. His stature in the aviation world—and the natural tendency of younger pilots to emulate a hero—was such that many people believe his West Virginia drawl to be the source of what has come to be known as the “Chuck Yeager pilot voice.”

41. Portions of the letter, but not the part dealing with tithe, are quoted in *This Day With God*, 372.

42. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, 196; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 2, 101; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, 305; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, 273. Oddly enough, this final passage, the one which presents the entire letter, further compounds the name confusion by spelling it as “Gravell” without the final “e.”

9. December 28, 1910

This letter, the only one written before the “better way” letter we’ve been looking at, was written on Ellen White’s behalf by Sara McEnterfer:⁴³

Again Sister White wishes me to thank you for the money you sent, and for which I am sending you a receipt, with her signature attached. Sister White will see that the money is used as you directed. I am sure it pleases her to have her brethren and sisters put such confidence in her, and she is very glad to have a little means that she can draw upon when she sees a needy cause. We pray that the money you have sent will accomplish much good, and that in the kingdom you will receive your reward....

Again thanking you for your kind offering, and wishing you all very much of the blessing of the Lord, I am,

Yours in the Master’s service,

Sara McEnterfer, (For Mrs. E.G. White)⁴⁴

What do we learn here? Well, the opening word, “again,” seems to imply that this was not the first time that Mrs. Gravelle had sent funds to Ellen White. I haven’t found evidence of any earlier instance, but it seems to be implied. We should note that Sara referred to the funds as a “kind offering,” so this letter may not be discussing tithe at all. That’s worth noting.

One year and a day later, Ellen White would write the “better way” letter, opening with the words, “A long time ago I received your letter enclosing a draft for \$100.” Perhaps she was referring to the same funds Sara wrote about, but it’s impossible to be sure. Ellen White identified the funds as \$25 for a thank offering and \$75 as tithe. If Sara was talking about the same instance, then it just means she was using “offering” in a general sort of way.

The next letter still available to us came from Willie, about three months after his mother’s letter. In it, he mentions dollar amounts that match what his mother had mentioned, so it is very probable that he is talking about the same situation his mother wrote about. Here’s what he had to say:

10. March 7, 1912

Dear Sister Gravelle,

To-day I must say as did the butler who appeared before Pharaoh, “This day I remember my failings.”

43. Sara deserves an introduction. Here’s a good overview: “Sara McEnterfer was a book binder, nurse, traveling companion, private secretary, stenographer, typist, and ‘executive secretary’ who effectively managed Ellen White’s household operations, visitors, and travel arrangements. She was one of White’s most trusted confidants and friends. Sara often referred to Ellen White simply as ‘mother’ and Ellen White treated her as an extension of her family.” encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=3JFJ

44. Sara McEnterfer, letter to Mrs. J.F. Gravelle, December 28, 1910; W.C. White Letterbook 21C, 373

Many months ago you wrote a letter to Mother, and enclosed some money, \$25.00 as a thank offering, and \$75.00 tithe, if I remember correctly. When this came to hand, Mother directed regarding the use of the money, and your letter was placed in my hand for reply. I waited week after week and month after month, to get something definite from Mother in answer to your questions. Finally in December she wrote to you, and this letter was given to me to enclose with one which I intended to write.

About this time one of my note books was mislaid, and Mother's letter to you was by me placed in an unusual place. In the note book I had made memoranda as to what I intended to write to you, and then, as I occasionally do, filed your letter before it was answered, depending upon the notes in my note book as a reminder. Today I find the note book, and in it memoranda made for answering your letter of November 8. That sent me to hunt for Mother's letter, and I find the copy which I will now enclose to you, though I suppose you have already received the copy sent you some time ago by Sister McEnterfer. The memoranda in my note book testify that \$75.00 tithe was used according to your request. I think it all went to Portland to help Elder Haskell in the special work he is doing there. The thank offering was applied on several small enterprises which Mother is helping. Regarding the tithe, I do not think I need to add anything to what Mother has written....

I sincerely regret my failure to write to you at a proper time. I was very sure when Sara asked me about it that I had written to you and sent a copy of Mother's letter.

With kindest regards and best wishes for your health and prosperity, I am

Yours very truly,

(signed) W.C. White⁴⁵

The portion of the letter replaced by the ellipsis consists of some newsy comments "regarding the work here on the Pacific Coast," and has no bearing on the tithe question. We don't learn a whole lot here. It seems to simply be an appropriate apology for a correspondence mix-up.

11. May 10, 1912

The next letter is from J.J., though, as always, she signed it "Mrs. J.F. Gravelle."

Greatly beloved servant of God,

I write these few lines again to thank you for the letters you and your son wrote me. I read them over and over again, and I am so glad to see the work go. And I shall be so glad when it is all done and we will all be gathered home. And I want a part in it.

Now I enclose in this a draft for (\$1,000.00) One Thousand Dollars from a very dear friend of mine. She wished me to send this to you to be used just as God directed you. It is tithe and offering. Now please accept it from us for the work you have to do. Just as God directs. We want to do just right. But please accept it and please to send a receipt to Mrs. Frances Leyman....

45. W.C. White, Letter to Mrs. J.J. Gravelle, March 7, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032688

Please answer soon so I will know it is safe.

(signed) Mrs. J.F. Gravelle⁴⁶

That final note is cute. Given the turn around time on her last letter, it's hard to blame her!

The only other thing that really stands out about this letter is that she provided no clear figures as to how much of the \$1,000 was tithe and how much was offering. Given that a thousand dollars was a very significant sum in those days, that strikes me as something of an oversight, the kind of thing that would create some logistical challenges on the other end.

12. May 16, 1912

Unsurprisingly, the folks at Elmshaven made sure to redeem themselves on this one! Lucy's letter got from Fargo, North Dakota, to California in five days, and Willie made sure to answer it the next day.

Dear Sister Gravelle,

Yesterday afternoon Mother received your letter of May 10, accompanied by a draft for \$1,000.00, which you tell us you have secured from a very dear friend who wished you to send it to Mother to be used for the work she has to do just as the Lord directs her.

In your letter you also tell Mother that you received and read with much interest the letters and documents which we sent you last March, and that you rejoice to hear of the progress of the work.

With this we may be able to send you copies of some circular letters which we are writing, telling something about Mother's visit to southern California, and what the Lord has strengthened her to do since her return; also about what she is doing in the bringing out of her writings in book form. We may also be able to send a copy, of a circular letter telling about the progress of the work at Loma Linda. There is surely a great work to be done in that place. The Lord is gathering together there faithful workers of broad experience who will unite their efforts to educate and train young men and women to go forth as medical evangelists and physicians; also many nurses are being trained to do the very best of work.

At this point in his letter, W.C. White tells how the old central heating boiler at Loma Linda had recently sprung a leak (which was far better than exploding, as it might well have done) and needed to be replaced. Unfortunately, this came at a time when the school was already facing a financial shortfall on the construction of the ill-fated, never-to-be-used-as-such "hospital" they were planning to build.⁴⁷

46. Mrs. J.F. Gravelle, Letter to Ellen G. White, May 10, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032689

47. For this story, I refer you to my book, *d'Sozo: Reversing the Worst Evil*.

Put simply, he was sharing the practical needs of the work with someone who had shown interest and might be able to assist. His letter continues:

There is another matter relating to the Loma Linda work over which Mother was specially burdened. She desires that some of the teachers and some of the older students shall enter important mission fields this summer, giving their help to men who are overburdened with work, and learning the conditions and necessities of the field so that they may present these conditions and necessities to the students and inspire them with enthusiasm for the work. A few days ago in discussing this matter, Mother told me that I might feel free to use two or three hundred dollars of her money to help in this work. And I had to tell her that her finances could not well bear this gift. Yet I felt that something must be done to encourage our people in Loma Linda to give their teachers a personal contact with the missionary work in progress in our Spanish-American fields.

Another financial matter that has been perplexing us is this: For some time Mother has maintained a fund which she calls The Neglected Workers' Fund. Each year a portion of the receipts from her books is carried to this fund, and occasionally she receives gifts from others which are placed in this fund, and from it she makes appropriations from time to time to faithful ones who have done much for the cause in time past, but now are in suffering need. Sometimes she helps the teachers in our southern schools and workers among the colored people from this fund. Just now that fund was overdrawn.

With all of these matters pressing upon her for consideration, you can imagine better than I can describe her gratitude and rejoicing at the receipt of one thousand dollars from Sister Lyman, to be used in the cause of God wherever Mother thought best.

With this I shall send you a receipt for the one thousand dollars, and unless you wish it otherwise, Mother will use the money as follows: Four hundred dollars she will put in her Neglected Workers' Fund from which she dispenses small sums to worthy and needy enterprises and individuals, and six hundred dollars she will send to Loma Linda to be used in part for the assistance of medical workers who are engaged in evangelistic work, and a part in helping to provide the hospital and the heating plant for the Loma Linda Sanitarium.⁴⁸

Mother has instructed me over and over again to express to you fully and clearly her appreciation and thankfulness for this one thousand dollars which you have placed in her hands....⁴⁹

Wishing you many blessings from the father of all mercies, I am

Yours very truly,

(signed) W.C. White⁵⁰

48. For those wishing to dive deep into the weeds of all this, the idea of using an undesignated portion of a sum which contained an undesignated portion of tithe, to help fund construction of a heating plant may raise questions. Two thoughts come to mind: Perhaps W.C. White knew more than we do about those funds, or perhaps Ellen White remembered that the name of the institution in question was the College of Medical *Evangelists* (not the College of Evangelistically Inclined Physicians), and considered that the promise of fruitful evangelism was worthy of tithe support.

49. The ellipsis represents a short paragraph recounting Ellen White's recent speaking appointments.

50. W.C. White, Letter to Mrs. J.J. Gravelle, May 16, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032690

What are we to learn from this letter? Perhaps the main impression it leaves is rejoicing for the Lord's provision of our needs. That's worth remembering! And worth sharing. Willie might have taken the money with a simple "Thank you," but how much better to share the joy they felt with the ones the Lord used to make it possible!

Seven months passed before the next letter from Mrs. Gravelle.

13. December 4, 1912

One gets the impression that Sister Gravelle enjoyed making donations to Ellen White. There is something rewarding about knowing that you've been a part of accomplishing some actual, specific, good thing. It's starting to look like Lucy is hooked!

Dearly beloved servant of God,

It has been some little time since I have written you. But I have been impressed to send you a little money. Enclosed please find fifty dollars (\$50.00) tithe. It is just a little for you to use where the dear Lord directs. I have your statement where the Lord shows you needy ones, and you help them, so this will help you just a little. Please use it just where the dear Father directs, and please send me a receipt for the same.

We are well, and enjoying many blessings. We are hoping and praying that the dear Father will bless you and keep you in health and strength for His work.

Your sister and family in the blessed hope,

(Signed) Mrs. J.F. Gravelle⁵¹

Short, sweet, and simple. No drama. No angling for special treatment or recognition. Just a simple desire to do what the Holy Spirit has impressed on the heart.

Willie's response was not a record-breaking performance like the last time, but it certainly qualified as "timely."

14. December 16, 1912

Dear sister Gravelle,

Mother has received, and read your letter of December 4, which was accompanied by a draft for fifty dollars (\$50.00), which she has instructed me to pass on to our brethren in Southern California who are carrying on a very faithful effort in the San Bernardino Valley and are very much in need of funds for the further prosecution of the work.

Willie fills most of a page telling of the good work going forward in Loma Linda, notes the expense of developing the program, and then says—

51. Mrs. J.F. Gravelle, Letter to Ellen G. White, December 4, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032691

Therefore from the beginning until now Mother has endeavored to help this work by gifts of her own personal funds and by using funds which others have placed in her hands. A few weeks ago she passed along eight dollars that she received from Brother Walter Harper.

There follows more than two full pages of newsy accounts of Ellen White's travels, and the book work going forward on what would eventually be *Prophets and Kings*, a new edition of *Christian Education*, a contemplated (but never produced) compilation with the tentative title *Letters to Physicians and Sanitarium Workers*,⁵² and a new edition of *Gospel Workers*. Willie tells of a recent trip that Sister White, Sara McEnterfer, Clarence Crisler, and he had taken to Loma Linda, recounting his mother's enthusiasm for the work there. He mentions that Sara's brother-in-law is in poor health, and tells how his own sixteen-year-old twins "are now printing some holiday cards." Basically, it's a friendly letter that closes like this:

Praying that the Lord's choicest blessings may be with you, I am
Yours very truly,
(signed) W.C. White

As far as I know, there is no further correspondence between the Elmshaven office and Sister Gravelle. So what does all that tell you? If you think back to the Option 1 or Option 2 choices we looked at on page 20, how would you view Ellen White's "better way" counsel? Was Lucy Gravelle being encouraged to quiet down and go along, or was she being coached on how to "encourage [her brethren] to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God"? Did her years of service for the church and her status as one "so well known in the North Dakota, South Dakota, Michigan, and Manitoba Conferences, one of the standbys of the Fargo, N.D., church"⁵³ equip her to exert a special kind of influence on the pastors and church officers?

But don't rush to judgment just yet, because there is more from the past which might help sharpen your perception and refine your conclusion. Let's see.

15. The "Many More"

In Ellen White's letter to Elder Watson (more on him in Sections 27 and 29), she encouraged him to "keep cool and not become stirred up and give publicity to this matter, lest many more shall follow their example." She explained that "for years there have now and then been persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe who have placed their tithe in my hands and said that if I did not take it they would themselves appropriate it to the families of

52. This material seems to have been set aside for many years, but likely formed at least the heart of the first Ellen G. White book to be published posthumously—*Medical Ministry* which was released in 1935.

53. *Northern Union Reaper*, June 5, 1917

the most needy ministers they could find. I have taken the money, given a receipt for it, and told them how it was appropriated.”⁵⁴

If the available records are anywhere near complete, she wasn’t talking about Lucy Gravelle, since the Watson letter came five years before Lucy’s first recorded gift to Ellen White. But does the shoe fit? Had Sister Gravelle lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe? She never said anything about it, at least not in her letters to Ellen and Willie. The closest we saw to any indication that someone wasn’t doing the right thing was Ellen White’s “encourage them to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God” comment—and even that depends on the idea that the encouragement was “corrective encouragement” rather than straight up “encouraging encouragement.”

And, by now, no doubt, you’ve noticed that neither Ellen nor Willie White ever reacted negatively to Lucy’s repeated donations. Their letters just don’t sound very condemnatory.

But Ellen White said that some people had lost confidence, and that “many more” might give up on the church’s system of doing things if they saw an alternative. What was that all about? Truth be told, it’s hard to tell. It turns out that other stories are far less complete than Mrs. Gravelle’s. It seems likely that people who had “lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe” didn’t have much confidence that they would be well received if they went to talk about it, so most of their stories never got recorded.

But there are a few exceptions, so let’s look at them.

16. *Walter Harper*

Brother Harper was a complex sort of guy. Like the rest of us, he had his strengths and his weaknesses.⁵⁵ Ellen White had occasion to both encourage and rebuke him, and she did as was needed at various times. One strength he possessed was skill and success as a colporteur, a genuine “literature evangelist” before anyone thought up the name.

Walter occasionally sent at least some of his tithe to Ellen White. Why? He didn’t much say, but we know of his practice because of little notes that show up in letters like these:

Walter Harper has been investing much money in a mining business. I dared not write him a word, fearing that whatever I might say, he would take it for granted that

54. E.G. White, Letter to G.F. Watson, January 22, 1905; Letter 267, 1905

55. Some of Walter’s weaknesses could prove to be a distraction from our topic. I don’t think there’s anything there that materially affects anything we are looking at, so I’m passing over them with just this one footnote. No doubt there are lessons to be gained from other aspects of Walter’s story, so feel free to delve into his broader background if you wish.

it was to encourage him in his investment. A few days ago he came to my room and laid before me \$95 of tithe money. Then he said, "Sister White, I have given up my mining operations. It was hard for me to do this, but it is done." I said, "Thank the Lord, Brother Harper." He continued, "I have given myself wholly to the Lord." He is now a happy man; for he has surrendered all to God.

He has since started out on another canvassing tour and will give the profits of one month's work to the cause—the profits of one week to the work in the South, of another to the work in Australia, of another to the relief of the schools, and of another to the Skodsborg Sanitarium.⁵⁶

I have seventy-five dollars from Brother Harper, tithe money, and we thought that it would be best to send it along to the Southern field to help colored ministers.... I want it specially applied to the colored ministers, to help them in their salaries.⁵⁷

Mr. Walter Harper, My dear brother,

The tithe money you placed in my hands was sent to Elder G.I. Butler to be used in the support of the colored ministers in the South.⁵⁸

Dear Brother Harper,

The tithe money you recently sent me was sent on to Elder Haskell, to be used in paying the colored ministers.⁵⁹

Dear Brother,

Your letter of March 9 to Sister White was forwarded to us while we were in Oakland, attending the meetings. She was very much pleased with its contents. She also wishes me to thank you for the \$100 tithe, and say to you that she will use it only as you request, as tithe. She has not yet, I think, fully decided where to appropriate it, and when she does, we will let you know.⁶⁰

Recently Brother Harper placed in Mother's hands \$100.00 tithes, and this with some which Mother received before, enables her to send to you the amount of the enclosed order, with the request that you place it in the hands of some of the most worthy and most needy of our Ministers in the South who have been doing legitimate Conference work, but who have not been paid by the Conference for whom they worked.

Mother has particularly in mind Elder J.O. Johnston of Eufola, N.C. I think my brother Edson is well acquainted with his circumstances and needs and he may be able to tell you of others who are most needy.⁶¹

Why was Walter doing this with his tithe? Hard to say. Maybe there was more than one reason; maybe there wasn't any great reason at all. Maybe he just

56. E.G. White, Letter to J.E. White and W.O. Palmer, January 27, 1902; Letter 24, 1902

57. E.G. White, Letter to J.E. and Emma White, October 23, 19028; Letter 262, 1902

58. E.G. White, Letter to Walter Harper, February 6, 1904; Letter 65, 1904

59. E.G. White, Letter to Walter Harper, October 27, 1905; Letter 307, 1905

60. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to Walter Harper, March 26, 1908; W.C. White Letterbook 21B, 443

61. W.C. White, Letter to S.N. Haskell, October 16, 1908; W.C. White Letterbook 36, 731

liked the idea of his money being directed in a way that seemed safe. We do get one clue, a partial explanation, maybe, in an exchange of letters between W.C. White and Stephen Haskell.

This is the comment Willie made that started it all:

With this letter was sent you Walter Harper's draft for one hundred dollars. I had requested him to send the money to you direct, but instead of doing this he sent it to Mother with the request that she send it to you. I learn incidentally that the officers of the Sanitarium church are not pleased with this method and that he may have some trouble in getting a letter⁶² to another church. When the matter comes to a crisis, there will be more or less feeling against Sister White for endorsing irregular methods.⁶³

Elder Haskell misunderstood part of what Willie was saying, and that showed up in his reply.

Your letter of May 7th just received and read with much pleasure.... One thing in your letter was of special interest to me, and that was that the Sanitarium Church would not grant Brother Harper a letter because he did not pay his tithe into the church treasurer. Why, that man will wear a crown in the new earth that those Sanitarium people could not dream of. He has brought more souls to a knowledge of the truth than any dozen of them put together. When law and order is more than souls, it is high time that some of the straps on the denominational harness are either loosened or cut. Harness is quite necessary in drawing the load, but when the straps are multiplied until they hinder the team from drawing, then there needs to be an adjusting of the harness.⁶⁴

W.C. spotted the misunderstanding, and made sure to correct the confusion.

If my letter to you conveyed the thought that Brother Harper cannot secure a letter from the Sanitarium church because he does not pay his tithe to that church, it said too much. The fact is that some are criticizing, and he may have trouble. He earns his money in many different States and territories, and feels it his privilege to pay his tithes in such a way that it will be used in very needy places; therefore he has often put it in Mother's hand.⁶⁵

So that was the explanation for Walter Harper's habit of giving his tithe to Ellen White. He sold a lot of books, and traveled widely in the process. And that, in his mind, apparently complicated the matter of tithe. I'm not sure I would come to the conclusion he did, but that's what individuality is all about. He just didn't feel like any one conference had a claim on it.

Willie doesn't say Walter had lost confidence in anyone or anything. It's just that his circumstances made it seem like a different approach was appropriate.

62. The "letter" here is the acknowledgment that Brother Harper is a member in good and regular standing, the first step in transferring membership to a new church.

63. W.C. White, Letter to Stephen Haskell, May 7, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032921

64. S.N. Haskell, Letter to W.C. White, May 21, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032926

65. W.C. White, Letter to Stephen Haskell, May 7, 1912; White Estate Archives Document 032921

And, although that made the whole procedure “irregular” to some minds, it wasn’t the sort of thing that Ellen White felt deserved a rebuke. Much like in Lucy Gravelle’s case, she thanked Walter for his trust in her and quietly made sure the Lord’s money was put to an appropriate use.

17. *Variations on a Theme*

Now, we’ve looked at Lucy Gravelle and Walter Harper, and it might seem like they constitute “the model” for how such things were handled.⁶⁶ But they don’t. No more than any other “model.” The tricky thing here is that “circumstances alter cases,” and so just when we think we’ve got *the answer*, it turns out that a *different* answer is sometimes the right answer. Let’s look at a few examples in that category.

Dear Sister,

Your letter of inquiry to Sister White is at hand, and since she is too feeble to write, I will just send you a line saying that Sister White would prefer not to take the burden of advising you how to dispose of your tithe. As you say, the work in the south is needy; but the Lord knows all about his work, and I believe that if you will seek him earnestly, he will lead you to do what is right and best in his sight.

May the Lord give you wisdom is my prayer.⁶⁷

Now, in all honesty, we should admit that this is not just a different answer, it is also a different question. It’s subtle, but there is a difference between “Will you take my tithe and distribute it?” and “Will you tell me ‘how to dispose’ of my tithe?” In the first case, the inquirer has settled on a plan of action and is asking for help carrying it out. In the second, the inquirer is asking for a plan to be handed down from the prophet. Significantly, the response is, “Seek the Lord earnestly, and He will lead you.”

There is a famous passage in *Steps to Christ* that touches on this sort of thing, and it makes a good point that fits nicely with this situation:

Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, “Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.” This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus

66. Indeed, there are other, similar cases which Ellen White handled in the same routine sort of way. Another such example is W.F. Van Atta’s \$50 of tithe, found in W.C. White Letterbook 21B. For some reason, or maybe for no reason, the response letter from Sara McEnterfer was included at the very back of the book, far past the Index pages and far from all other contents of the book. There is no page number in the book to indicate its location, but it is on page 532 of the PDF version of the Letterbook.

Interestingly, Brother Van Atta was living in Colorado at the time.

67. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to Mrs. S.M. Oleson, April 20, 1903; W.C. White Letterbook 21A, 40

day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.⁶⁸

The starting point for this process is having plans. Sometimes we forget that. I remember a time, several decades ago, when I could see that I needed to be somewhere else. The circumstances I was in were several steps below acceptable, so I began to pray for the Lord to show me where to go. I prayed for a couple months, but the Lord evidently saw no benefit in responding. Then one day, suddenly, as I was praying along in the middle of my well-rehearsed presentation of all the evidence that it was pointless to stay where I was, a startling new thought crashed into my mind. “Dave, if you’re so smart and you’ve figured out that it makes no sense to stay where you are, why don’t you *leave*?”

Now, in my defense, I was young, broke, and marvelously short on worldly possessions (including anything with wheels), so the details of exactly where I ought to go—and how I was supposed to get there—were less than obvious. But I still remember the intensely liberating thought that I was given a brain for an actual reason. So I made a plan. It wasn’t a great plan; there were plenty of unavoidable unknowns, but it was a plan.⁶⁹

Not everyone was impressed. Some actually scoffed (I forgive them). It was mostly the opening act of my plan—1,400 miles of hitchhiking—that drew criticism. But, in the end, the day I was intending to take off an Adventist gentleman happened along who was headed my way and was looking for another driver. True, he needed to make a bit of a diversion that added an extra 800 miles to my planned journey, but that one ride took me the whole way.⁷⁰

OK, now back to Mrs. Oleson. She wanted Ellen White to tell her how to “dispose of her tithe,” and Ellen White graciously declined. That turns out to be a spot-on illustration of something she had written a few years earlier:

The tithing system was ordained by God, and it had been observed from the earliest times. Abraham, the father of the faithful, paid tithes of all that he possessed. The Jewish rulers recognized the obligation of tithing, and this was right; but they did not leave the people to carry out their own convictions of duty. Arbitrary rules were laid down for every case.⁷¹

68. *Steps to Christ*, 70

69. I’m pretty dense at times, but it eventually dawned on me that the counsel called on me to *make* a plan, rather than beg for a plan. I had been asking for a plan to fall in my lap, and God thought I should do what I could before expecting Him to work a miracle in my behalf.

70. As an added benefit that I didn’t recognize till thirty years later, that extra mileage resulted in my meeting a lady who had done a considerable amount of research on a number of Adventist history topics. Long story... but because of that meeting, I eventually inherited thirty-two apple boxes full of her “lifework.” It was there that I discovered the lost-to-history materials upon which I based the major thesis of my book, *d’Sozo: Reversing the Worst Evil*.

71. *Desire of Ages*, 616

Ellen White chose to avoid all that. Why? I suspect because she believed that Mrs. Oleson was better off having “convictions” of her own, rather than an arbitrary ruling from the prophet. With the latter, the only conviction left to talk about is, “Do I do what the prophet said or don’t I?” This turns the whole issue into a binary system of “Yes” or “No,” and strips away the nuance of “it depends on the circumstances.” As we’ll see later, that can be a problem.

18. People and Time

There’s an old saying which the internet tells me is attributed to one John Lydgate. I have no idea who he was, but apparently he’s considered very wise for having said, “You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can’t please all of the people all of the time.”⁷²

When it comes to people, I aspire to what I call “charitable skepticism.” Given that perspective, it is perhaps no surprise that I place more confidence in the last phrase of Lydgate’s comment than in either of the first two. I’m guessing that just about everyone who has ever tried to coordinate a large group of people to accomplish a big job will have a similar view of the matter. And, unsurprisingly, church administrators don’t get a free pass on this sort of thing any more than the rest of us. So let’s check in with a few unhappy campers. They always say your critics can be your best helpers, so let’s give it a go.

Our first example is pretty bare bones on the details, but worth the time to consider, especially since this letter fits into the background of Lucy Gravelle’s letters and possible concerns.

Dear Brother,

Your letter of January 28, accompanied by postal order for \$51.25 plus one cent postage stamp, came to hand some time ago and I must apologize to you for the delay in answering.

Mother wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of the same and to say to you that she is sorry you do not feel free to pay your tithe to the Conference in which you reside, and as you have placed in her hand the responsibility of placing this money where it is much needed, she will use it to assist in keeping in the field some colored ministers in the Southern States whose conferences are so pressed for means.

The good brother who sent the money lived in Grand Forks, North Dakota, about eighty miles north of Fargo and the Gravelles. Odds are, they knew each other. Did they share the same concerns? I can’t tell you. I don’t know.

72. With today’s sensibility on such matters, Lydgate would be charged with plagiarizing Abraham Lincoln’s “You can fool all of the people....” quote. Or maybe Lincoln plagiarized Lydgate? Whatever.

What I can tell you is that Ellen White was sorry he wasn't keen on supporting his local conference. But that's all I know. Was she sorry that he had a critical spirit? I don't know. Was she sorry that someone at the conference level had done something stupid or unrighteous that made them unworthy of church members' confidence? I don't know. The only context I have to consider is the rest of Willie's letter:

It was my privilege a few weeks ago to visit Nashville, Huntsville, and several other places in the South and east. Today I am sending to the *Review* a report covering a part of this trip and I will enclose to you a copy of a letter that I have recently written, telling briefly what I saw in some of our institutions to give us courage and zeal in pushing forward the work in the South. I wonder if some of the brethren in your neighborhood would not be pleased to take the responsibility of furnishing one of the rooms in the colored sanitarium in Nashville or Huntsville.

With kindest regards and hoping to hear from you again, I am

Yours very truly,

(signed) W.C. White⁷³

No condemnation, no special awards. Pretty straight forward. Not a lot to consider here, so let's move on to another example with something more tangible to work with. But to do so, we have to back up a few years.

The 1890s were a tough decade for Adventism. Ellen White was in Australia most of that time, and things were slipping seriously back at Battle Creek. I think it's important to point out that the 1890s and the 1900s were two quite different decades. Circumstances were not the same. Dr. Kellogg was far more helpful in the earlier years, but conditions at the General Conference and the *Review* were as low as they ever got in Ellen White's lifetime. The 1890s were the decade of all the "not the voice of God" statements, and a lot of things changed as a result of the 1901 General Conference session. So there were differences, but if we confine ourselves to the search for potential reasons for a loss of "confidence in the appropriation of the tithe," none of those differences really matter much. One detail that will be helpful is to remember the two phrases introduced back on page 8: "regular lines" was a reference to the administrative control that was focused in the General Conference, and "regular channels" was a reference to the collection and distribution of funds under the jurisdiction of the General Conference.

A plain spoken but still friendly exchange between W.C. White and the General Conference treasurer, I.H. Evans, helps us see the issue at hand. We'll hear from Willie first:⁷⁴

73. W.C. White, Letter to James K. White, February 18, 1909; W.C. White Letterbook 37, 499

It seems to me, Brother Evans, that you stand where Rehoboam stood. He represented the chosen family appointed of God to rule the chosen nation of the earth. He was surrounded by everything that was regular, that was sacred in the eyes of the people, and he was appealed to to correct certain evils. If he had humbled himself to the work and given it the attention which it deserved, he could have preserved a united nation. But he preferred to believe that the reverence of the people for the institutions which he represented was so strong that they would stand by the royal family without any assurance that evils would be investigated and corrected. It is my desire and purpose to stand by the regular channels and in order that we may understand each other when we use this term, I think we must admit that a stagnant pool is not a channel, and when our state treasurers, for any reason, permit money that is needed in important enterprises to rest idle in their banks, that they are acting irregularly and they cease to be regular channels. Secondly, there may be more than one regular channel,⁷⁵ and the term "regular channel" does not necessarily mean the most round-about and time killing method that can be adopted.

For the majority of our people who have small contributions, the most convenient method is to pay their money to the church treasurer and let it pass to the state treasurer, the Union Conference treasurer, the General Conference treasurer, and from him to the enterprise for which it was given.

For persons of means, making large donations or even small donations, from business men who are accustomed to sending money by bank draft or post-office order to parties with whom they are doing business, I believe it is just as regular a channel for them to send their remittance direct to the treasurer of the enterprise that they wish to help or the treasurer of the Union Conference in which that enterprise is operated.

When people ask me about making remittances to the Huntsville school or Takoma Park Sanitarium or the Avondale Press, I say to them, You can send a draft direct to the treasurer of the institution, or if you prefer you can send a draft to the treasurer of the Union Conference in which the institution is located; or if you prefer, you can pay it to your church treasurer and let him forward it with other moneys going the same way. The latter plan will take a little more time. By either plan it will surely reach the enterprise you wish to be benefited.

Now my claim is that these are regular channels, but I see a sentiment growing that there is danger of censure from the minister or the Conference officers if the gift does not go the longest and slowest route.

The gift made by one of our brethren in the North for a southern institution, which required nine months to reach its destination, might have reached them in two weeks and would have been of service during eight months and two weeks, and I wish to ask you if it would have been a violation of correct methods if the party making the gift had chosen to send it direct.

74. This material is referenced in my book, *For Such a Time*. If you've read that and have a good memory, you might want to skip ahead a bit. But there's enough complexity to the details here, so I'd think most folks could gain something of value even from a re-run.

75. We'll look at Ellen White's position on this more directly in Section 20.

SIDEBAR: THE VOICE OF GOD

The 1890s provide a pointed illustration of “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.”⁷⁶

Ellen White’s presence and commentary had chafed a number of administrators in Battle Creek, especially since the “Minneapolis meeting” of 1888. Like all the rest of us, the idea of life flowing along without a lot of drama appealed to them, and they imagined that such would be the case if certain individuals spent their time worrying about other parts of the Lord’s vineyard. Australia presented itself as a promising option, sitting as it did barely 1,200 miles (less than 2,000 kilometers) northeast of Battle Creek’s exact antipole.⁷⁷

There was so great a willingness to have us leave that the Lord permitted this thing to take place. Those who were weary of the testimonies borne were left without the persons who bore them. Our separation from Battle Creek was to let men have their own will and way, which they thought superior to the way of the Lord. The result is before you.⁷⁸

That “result” was a tragic mess:

The sacred character of the cause of God is no longer realized at the center of the work. The voice from Battle Creek, which has been regarded as authority in counseling how the work should be done, is no longer the voice of God; but it is the voice of—whom? From whence does it come, and where is its vital power? This state of things is maintained by men who should have been disconnected from the work long ago. These men do not scruple to quote the Word of God as their authority, but the god who is leading them is a false god.⁷⁹

It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God.⁸⁰

76. Proverbs 29:18

77. There are two closer points of land—Amsterdam Island and St. Paul Island—both belonging to France, but they represent a combined area of only about twenty-six square miles (fifty-six square kilometers) and in the 1890s the only inhabitants were a herd of feral cattle left over from a failed ranching enterprise. In late 1899 the shipwreck of the *Holt Hill* on St. Paul Island provided the only local excitement for many years. The survivors were rescued after eight days, among them Charles Lightoller who would later gain a degree of fame as the Second Officer of the *Titanic* on her ill-fated maiden voyage. Later still, he piloted his own private vessel, the *Sundowner*, in Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of 400,000 Allied soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk. Despite the ship being rated for a maximum of 21 persons, Lightoller crowded on 130 thankful men. trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/3505107 and genealogyreviews.co.uk/reviews/article/the-unsinkable-hero/

78. E.G. White, Letter to O.A. Olsen, December 1, 1896; Letter 127, 1896

79. E.G. White, Letter to the Men who occupy Responsible Positions in the Work, July 1, 1896; Letter 4, 1896

80. E.G. White, Letter to E.J. Waggoner, August 26, 1898; Letter 77, 1898

It is working upon wrong principles that has brought the cause of God into its present embarrassment. The people have lost confidence in those who have the management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the Conference is the voice of God. Every time I have heard this, I have thought that it was almost blasphemy. The voice of the Conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not, because some in connection with it are not men of faith and prayer, they are not men of elevated principle. There is not a seeking of God with the whole heart; there is not a realization of the terrible responsibility that rests upon those in this institution to mold and fashion minds after the divine similitude.⁸¹

It was a grim decade. At her first General Conference session after returning to America, Ellen White summed it up like this:

The management of the work is becoming confused in itself. Not that anyone wishes to be wrong or to do wrong, but the principles are wrong. These principles are so foreign to God's principles that God cannot bless those who work upon them. What must be done is to bring in other minds. Those who have been at work in the same channels for years have been discouraged and confused. We cannot entrust to such as these the tremendous responsibilities which are now to be handled.⁸²

But that was the 1890s, and circumstances changed as years passed. Sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. To make a blanket application of quotations from one time to a different time is deceitful, foolish, or both. To make an honest comparison of the circumstances at one time, to the circumstances at another time, makes sense. To the degree and manner in which they are similar, God's opinion of the one, probably applies to the latter.

There was more than one way to get from Egypt to Canaan. By one route the journey could have been made in less than forty days, but a route was chosen which took much longer. Were they not both regular?⁸³

So the basic issue in Willie's mind was efficiency. Seems like a good thing... but nothing is so simple as that. Brother Evans was quick to point out the other side of the considerations:

Dear Brother,

I am in receipt also of your kind communication bearing date of February 19, and have read the same with much interest....

I am of the opinion that the present organized plan of carrying on the work is complete enough in its details, providing the machinery is kept in motion. There are in-

81. E.G. White, "Talk: Regarding the Southern Work," April 1901; Manuscript 37, 1901

82. *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1728

83. W.C. White, Letter to I.H. Evans, February 19, 1907; W.C. White Letterbook 33, 55-56

stances, undoubtedly, when money has been slow in reaching the specific place for which it has been contributed, yet I doubt if this evil is to be compared to what would result if everybody was turned loose to make remittances to whatever enterprises they might choose, and do that which seemed to appeal to them at the moment when they were giving. I can see great harm coming, were each of us to operate in harmony with your suggestions. From the stand point of your communication, I am unable to understand how there could be any equitable distribution of funds, and it would seem to me that those who cried the loudest and made the greatest noise would be the ones who would receive the largest amount of help, while those who were walking humbly before God, conscientiously trying to do their best, would often times pass through severe suffering for want of assistance....

At the present time, should everyone feel inclined to make their contributions as they pleased, sending direct, there would be no check on the amounts that any party would be receiving, and many would plunge headlong into extravagant expenses, others would be calling for help for suffering institutions and work, and in a few years our work would be in a state of paralyzed disintegration and confusion.

If there are cases such as you cite, of business men who desire to send the money direct, of course, they are at liberty to do so. The same is true of parties who will not pay their tithe to the church to which they belong, so that it may pass through the State and Union Conference treasuries, yet this is not the plan we have advocated, nor the thing we have ever thought was for the best. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to the general rules, and we cannot draw the lines too tight lest harm result.

Surely, I have no disposition whatever to occupy the position of a "Rehoboam" in the cause of God. I only have a desire to see this cause advance, and to see everything carried on in harmony with what is God's plan. Personally, I have no choice, whether the funds go through the General Conference treasury, or through any other treasury. If I were in Halifax, or in Abyssinia, I should hold to the same position that I hold now. I long believed in that plan before I ever had anything to do with the management of the general affairs of the denomination. And yet, I am sure there are times when funds lie dormant for some time, when it would be better had they been hurried through, yet I consider this evil the lesser of the two. However, if our general men feel differently, and think that it should be generally adopted, that funds should be sent wherever the party giving desires to send them direct, it is their privilege to speak, and I shall certainly cooperate with whatever plans are laid for the advancement of the work.⁸⁴

Elder Evans had a point! Several points, actually. If the funding for every Adventist project or mission field or conference were to be stripped of all overarching coordination, it would be absolute chaos! Those who figured out how to run the public relations machine would be *very* well funded, and everyone else would be running to the bookstore to get a copy of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

84. I.H. Evans, Letter to W.C. White, March 4, 1907; White Estate Archives Document 021510

Evans' natural reaction was to fear any extreme position eroded administrative control. Fair enough... but was anyone advocating that extreme? Interestingly, he was clearly reasonable enough to understand that there would be exceptions: "business men who desire to send the money direct... [and] parties who will not pay their tithe to the church to which they belong." His comment about not "drawing the lines too tight" reflects Ellen White's earlier warning:

Laws and rules are being made at the centers of the work that will soon be broken into atoms. Men are not to dictate....

If the cords are drawn much tighter, if the rules are made much finer, if men continue to bind their fellow-laborers closer and closer to the commandments of men, many will be stirred by the Spirit of God to break every shackle, and assert their liberty in Christ Jesus.... No human being shall be permitted to prescribe my liberty or in-trench upon the perfect freedom of my brethren, without hearing my voice lifted in protest against it.⁸⁵

So it boils down to this: Coordination is good; but when coordination morphs into a too-rigid control, it produces unacceptable side-effects, and some church members won't accept it. First, they go looking for reasonable alternatives. Eventually, such abuse may call for the breaking of shackles and the assertion of liberty. When that is prompted by the Spirit of God, it's a good thing. When it's not, it isn't.

19. Down at the Roots

We are still exploring the reasons that "many more" might choose to opt out of the "regular channels." So far, we don't have a lot. Lucy Gravelle and Walter Harper just kind of chose to do their own thing without pointing to any profound philosophical or theological motivation.

We noted the different reactions of Ellen White to those who had a plan for their tithe and asked her to be a part of it, and those who came asking to be told what to do with their tithe. We read Willie's plea for efficiency, and I.H. Evans' plea for order and structure. But there's one more influence that deserves consideration—an influence which should actually be the greatest factor of them all. Sadly, we see this most dramatically acknowledged on account of its absence.

A condition of things has been brought about that, unless God in mercy shall interpose, will work disaster to His cause. Inexperienced minds are being troubled at the outlook. For reasons that you can give, God is not moving upon the hearts of His people to supply the treasury.⁸⁶

85. *Review and Herald*, July 23, 1895

86. *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1367

The people of God who have been raised up with a knowledge of the truth have become confused. They have lost their confidence in the General Conference because of the misappropriation of means, and the Lord does not move upon their hearts to pass in their means to the Conference.⁸⁷

When God stops “moving on hearts,” you know there’s a problem somewhere. “Misappropriation of means” is mentioned, and, yes, that sounds bad. To the best of my knowledge, though, that isn’t a reference to anything like embezzlement. At worst, it was spending money where it wasn’t really needed, and neglecting fields or workers where it was needed. It’s possible that Ellen White just had the whole slow-like-a-snail delivery funds in her mind when she wrote that sentence. But the root issue is that the Holy Spirit was not “moving upon the hearts of His people to supply the treasury.” That’s important... and sad.

What God is doing deserves our attention. Where He’s working, that’s where we want to be. What He’s pushing forward, that’s what we want to be pushing, too. And when He stops doing something that He regularly does, something He would like to keep doing for the good of His own work, it’s time for His people to sit up, take notice, and, more than likely, get to work to straighten something out. By the late 1890s, there was plenty of that kind of thing to do.

The same year as the last Ellen White letter above, Willie White wrote about the need to recognize the Lord’s leading. The idea is simple enough, but the rubber meets the road when it comes to actually acknowledging what God is doing.

The point to which I wish to call your particular attention is this question of the regular way and the regular channels. When God sends a man to do a special work in a new field, and gives him wisdom to pioneer that work successfully, and makes him the successful leader and teacher, when He blesses the man and his work, does not God thus make him a regular channel, and are not his ways the regular ways? Please consider carefully what the Testimonies have said regarding the wrong of our endeavoring to put all our benevolences through one channel. Read what has been written about the evils of our brethren attempting to manage the work in distant fields and work of varied character through two or three boards, made up largely of the same men.

Then study the experience of the General Conference during the last three or four years in its management of the Southern field. Note the feebleness, the insufficiency, the indifference, and tell me frankly if you can conscientiously say that the regular way and the regular channel for the management of the work in Mississippi was through the General Conference Association, the General Conference Committee, or the superintendent of district number two. I tell you, my brother, the Lord is always making new channels. When the old ones become full up or are clogged, He makes

87. E.G. White, “Remarks at a Special Meeting Held in the Avondale School Chapel,” July 25, 1899; Manuscript 103a, 1899

new channels, and whenever He makes a new channel, it is regular. This is gospel truth, and I beg of you to study it until you can stand beside Brethren Irwin and Haskell in its maintenance before our people. If we reject this principle, we place ourselves beside the Jews who refused to recognize Paul because he was not numbered among the twelve apostles whom Jesus first chose.⁸⁸

Of all the “circumstances” which might “alter cases,” this issue of knowing where and through whom the Lord is working is certainly one of the most basic, one of the most “down at the roots” of them all. When Ahab and Jehoshaphat sat on their thrones and listened to the four hundred prophets (including Chenaanah, with his custom made “horns of iron” since what he had to say was pointless without them), the alternative option of Micaiah the son of Imla didn’t look all that credible. But God was speaking through Micaiah despite the lying spirit having the louder mouthpiece.

In that case, the options *were* binary. There are only two masters, and you can’t serve both. But sometimes it’s not! Some issues just aren’t intended to be that cut-and-dried. The devil, of course, will always try to apply “nuance” or even “scholarship” to obfuscate the fixed issues, and will always tempt us to treat the more variable items as if they were solid bedrock. Bedrock is important! But when the devil gets us majoring in minors and minoring in majors, trouble is a’brewing.

If “the Lord does not move upon” the hearts of “the people of God” to “pass in their means to the Conference,” that’s probably all the explanation we need when it comes to understanding the decisions of those people.

But notice that there’s nothing in that statement that would make us believe that if *some* church members are not “moved upon” to “pass in their means to the Conference,” that it means that *no* church members could be “moved upon” to “pass in their means to the Conference.” People are different, they’re individuals, and we have every reason in the world to believe that God works differently with different minds and hearts. Think back to the snowflakes and the clouds; they don’t come off standardized assembly lines.

88. W.C. White, Letter to C.H. Jones, August 15, 1899; W.C. White Letterbook 13, 432. Worth noting: Elder and Mrs. Haskell had spent three years in Australia, working closely with Ellen and Willie White. Ten days before this letter was written, the Haskells and General Conference president G.A. Irwin (after two months in Australia) had set sail on the R.M.S. *Moana*, returning to San Francisco by way of Honolulu. The three veteran workers had a daunting mission: to hold a series of “Bible Institutes” in the four “hubs” of American Adventism (central and northern California, Battle Creek and the Midwest, the South, and the Northeast) in an effort to stem several crises. These included the “Holy Flesh” movement, the budding “Kellogg crisis,” excess institutional debt just about everywhere, the training of lay workers for city evangelism, and—likely most central to Willie’s plea for Jones’s cooperation with the Haskells and Irwin—the normalizing of relationships between the denomination and the growing work of the Southern Missionary Society.

God desires to bring men into direct relation with Himself. In all His dealings with human beings He recognizes the principle of personal responsibility. He seeks to encourage a sense of personal dependence and to impress the need of personal guidance. He desires to bring the human into association with the divine, that men may be transformed into the divine likeness. Satan works to thwart this purpose. He seeks to encourage dependence upon men.⁸⁹

Whoa, cowboy! Yes, that's a pretty dynamite idea in a world that seeks to enforce conformity, but the same author also wrote this:

I say to all, Press together, press together. Be very critical in regard to yourselves, but exercise all the tenderness of Christ toward your brethren. I entreat the Lord's people to cease to criticize one another, and to give themselves to the proclamation of the truth for this time.⁹⁰

We're talking about balance here, and balance is hard. Human beings are generally pretty terrible with this sort of thing. It's one of the most obvious symptoms of sin—except when it comes to spotting it in ourselves. Then it becomes a master of disguise. Chameleons are rank amateurs compared to what imbalance does to hide. It can look like “noble independence,” and it can look like “loyal support”—and it can be deadly in either form.

So if church members avoid the regular channels because the Lord isn't prompting them that way, what's the flip side of the story? Is there a reason for those who sometimes work so hard to assert that the regular channels are the *only* proper method? Of course, those who are leaning that way are going to say there's a reason for it. So... what's the reason? Simple. It's control.

20. “Come in, Mission Control”

(This section diverges slightly from the issue of tithe in order to focus on root causes, so please bear with me for a couple minutes. It's not as much of a diversion as it looks like at first.)

Give a moment's thought to the immense task of coordinating the work of God's church. World-wide. 24/7. Three hundred sixty-five days a year.⁹¹ Add to

89. *Ministry of Healing*, 242

90. *Review and Herald*, April 19, 1906

91. With NASA's level of precision, that would be 365.2422 days. That's because it takes about an extra 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 46 seconds to make a complete orbit around the sun. On average. The funny thing is that no two years are exactly the same. (Add that to the snowflakes and clouds list!) Why? A bunch of stuff, but planetary tugging is the big one. Sometimes Jupiter and Saturn (the two big kids on our block) are closer, sometimes farther, so the gravity isn't always the same. Since 1900, the shortest year (starting at the spring equinox) was 1911 at 365 days, 5 hours, 35 minutes, 5 seconds. In contrast, 2032 will be 365 days, 6 hours, 57 seconds! At least, that's what these folks think: timeanddate.com/astronomy/tropicalyearlength.html

that all the people, cultures, customs, concepts, and circumstances that influence the flow of events. It would be great to say, “God’s got this,” and just sit back to see what He does. But that’s not His plan. He actually thinks it’s a good idea for us to have something productive to do, so from Eden on down He’s given us a part of the job.

We plant the seeds, but He makes them grow. Sometimes there’s a lot of weeding and watering and pruning that needs to be done, too, and that’s our job. But He makes the crops grow, and occasionally He works a special miracle to make them grow extra, or last longer, or feed more people. We can’t do any of that stuff, and generally we’ve got our hands full with what we can do. That’s just the way life works.

But now imagine trying to figure that all out when it comes to the church. Pretend you’re a conference president, or a union president, or a university president, or even just a local pastor. Start with your family... they need to live, too. There are bills to pay, a car and a house to care for, kids that need an education, extended family, in-laws, the whole nine yards. Then there’s your job, and goals to accomplish, so toss in the need for money to pay people and buy stuff. Budgets are great, but they make predictions, not guarantees. Toss in all the people who make dumb mistakes, and all the people with monkey wrenches to put into the gears of your plans. Toss in the devil’s efforts to mess up or to totally derail everything you’re hoping to see accomplished.

Now toss in a decade or two or three of watching other people navigate all the above. Think of the lessons learned and the impressions made by every example you’ve seen of what seems to work, and what seems to fail. Think of the complaints people have made about you, and the incentives—formal or otherwise—to see that things are done in a certain way. And remember, you’re the president (or pastor), the guy in charge. The one where the buck stops.

What do you want, to try and keep all that from blowing up in your face?

Cut to the chase: you want control. Any way to guarantee anything. That’s what you want. And it’s not bad.

Not until it is bad. And that’s a hard line to spot. Sometimes it takes a jolting question to reframe the discussion. When needed, Elder W.C. White was willing to provide that:

Regarding the arguments used against the self-supporting schools, I would be pleased to write at length, but this morning I have only a very brief time at my disposal, and therefore must write briefly. The schools are objected to because “we cannot control the property.”

Why should we control the property? If the property is placed where it cannot be controlled selfishly by any of the individuals who have donated to it, why should we

wish to control it? Why not let it be controlled by those who have donated to it, and are using it unselfishly for the advancement of the Lord's work.

Control is a good thing. Things—people, institutions, programs, whatever—that aren't under control are going to cause problems. But *who* should have the control? In a situation where multiple parties see an advantage in controlling something, how do we decide who actually gets that right?

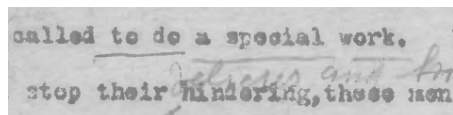
This question of control is a good step or two removed from our primary topic of tithe, but not as distinct as it may seem. Willie's letter goes on, telling a story that's worth hearing again.

A year ago last January or thereabouts, mother called me as I was passing from my home to the office, and said she had something important to say to me. I said, Let us go up to your room. She said, No; I will tell it to you here. And so we stood on the walk by her kitchen door while she gave me the message. She said, It is represented to me that our brethren who have so much to say about the regular channels, regular channels, regular channels, regular methods, regular control, are hindering the work in many ways and in many places. They are hindering it a hundred times more than anybody understands, and I want you to remember what I say, and as you have opportunity to bear your testimony against this work of hindering and discouraging men whom God has called to do a special work. If our brethren would stop their criticizing, would stop their (?)⁹² and hindering, these men would do a good work and would encourage others to consecrate themselves to the work in the hard places, and to doing a work that God will approve. She said, I want you to bear this in mind, to remember what I am saying to you, and to bear your testimony against this hindering of the work, as you have opportunities.

I said to her, Mother, I will try to remember, but I do not see any reason why you should be bearing this burden just now. As far as I know, the work being conducted by brethren Sutherland and Magan is recognized and encouraged by our people. I do not know that any hindering hands are being extended to this line of work.

A few months later I went to Washington to attend a council, and there Elder Thompson raised the question in the council as to how we ought to relate ourselves to the independent so-called self-supporting schools. He closed his question with remarks which leaned heavily toward criticism. This was like opening the floodgates of a mill race. Men from different fields arose and presented questions and criticisms which grew stronger and more severe. I was surprised and shocked that such a large number of men who desire to walk in harmony with the counsels that the Lord has given us through the testimonies and who were so familiar with the messages that have been given regarding the work being done at Madison, men who were familiar with the statement that similar work should be

92. I spent a lot of time trying, but I just can't figure out what this handwritten word is supposed to be. If you figure it out, please let me know.



done elsewhere, men who are familiar with the statement that we are not to withdraw our support from this work because it was not owned and controlled by the conference—I say I was surprised and shocked that they could present arguments and make speeches that seemed to me to ignore those Testimonies, or to count them as of little consequence.

Finally this matter was referred to a committee, and in the committee meeting, the act of Sister Rumbaugh in giving \$5,000 for the establishment of the Naples School was repeatedly referred to as placing \$5,000 in the hands of Professor Spaulding to squander. And this was repeated again and again after I had stated to them decidedly and repeatedly the fact that the Naples School was owned by a Board of Trustees the members of which were Mrs. Rumbaugh, Sydney Brownsberger, E.A. Sutherland, P.T. Magan, and Ray Williams, and after I had stated to them that Professor Spaulding, whose financial ability they questioned, was not only left off the board of trustees, but that the business and financial management of the school had been placed in the hands of Professor Sydney Brownsberger, a man of good business ability, and a man with a long training in economy while living on a South Carolina farm.

After this experience in Washington my mind ran back to the time when Mother gave me the charge to stand in protest against this cry of regular channels, and I found it was just about the time that Brethren Brownsberger and Spaulding were deciding to work together and were hunting for a location.⁹³

No, Ellen White wasn't throwing away the regular channels. *They* weren't the problem that needed protesting. It wasn't the channels, it was the mistaken cry of the well-intended church workers who sought to defend them that Willie was commissioned to protest. What was the mistake? The idea of a monopoly.

The Lord works through various agencies. If there are those who desire to step into new fields and take up new lines of labor, encourage them to do so. Seventh-day Adventists are doing a great and good work; let no man's hand be raised to hinder his brother. Those who have had experience in the work of God should be encouraged to follow the guidance and counsel of the Lord.

Do not worry lest some means shall go direct to conscientious laborers who are trying to do missionary work in a quiet and effective way. All the means is not to be handled by one agency or organization. There is much business to be done conscientiously for the cause of God. Help is to be sought from every possible source. There are men who can do the work of securing means for the cause; and when these are acting conscientiously and in harmony with the counsels of their fellow laborers in the field

93. W.C. White, Letter to M.H. Brown, April 23, 1911; White Estate Archives Document 027193. When reading W.C. White's letters, the question sometimes comes up as to whether he might not be putting a bit more emphasis on a point than his mother would. It's a fair question. As a general rule, I find Willie to lean more toward understatement rather than exaggeration, but surely there must be some exceptions, and this rather emphatic account seems like the kind of thing one might justly wonder about.

Except for that fact that the letter shows well over thirty notes of agreement and insertion of even stronger language all written in Ellen White's handwriting. Twice she initialed these interlinear edits, and several times she wrote to the effect that "this is as it is presented to me."

which they represent, the hand of restraint is not to be laid upon them. Those who are laborers together with Him who gave His life for the salvation of souls must not be bound about with territorial restraints.

Brethren Sutherland and Magan should be encouraged to solicit means for the support of their work. It is the privilege of these brethren to receive gifts from any of our people whom the Lord impresses to help. They should have means—God’s means—with which to work. The Madison enterprise has been crippled in the past, but now it must go forward. If this work had been regarded in the right light, and had been given the help it needed, we should long ere this have had a prosperous work at Madison. Our people are to be encouraged to give of their means to this work which is preparing students in a sensible and creditable way to go forth into neglected fields to proclaim the soon coming of Christ.⁹⁴

There are a number of takeaways here, so let’s chew on this one a bit. For starters: “various agencies.” That’s a big deal, especially for control freaks. Put simply, it means no one gets to control everything. Think of it a bit like the separation of powers in a government.

Number two: No one gets all the money. This is Willie’s point about new channels—“the Lord is always making new channels.” That’s one way God’s work grows.

Number three: The folks pioneering those new channels need to act “conscientiously and in harmony with the counsels of their fellow laborers.” Bend over backwards to avoid ruffling feathers unnecessarily. But if their “fellow laborers” tell them to shut up and go away... then what?

Well, that’s an overreach, and it’s clearly out of line. “The hand of restraint is not to be laid upon them.” This is where the friction comes in. The folks doing the restraining sincerely believe they’re protecting God’s church, so they push forward bravely. The folks being restrained sincerely believe they’re doing the work God has called them to, so the push forward bravely. Coming out of a scrape like that without black eyes all around is a rare thing. But if one party or the other could just de-escalate things enough so the two sides could actually work through the issues, this is precisely the sort of situation that God loves to turn into a major breakthrough.

How do you work through such matters? Start with prayer. And check your ego at the door. After that, I would propose commissioning someone to do a thorough study of the topic (or do it yourself), so the people involved can actually know what they are talking about. It’s not quite as serious as the “book of the law” having been lost for decades,⁹⁵ but much that has been said (I choose

94. E.G. White, Letter to Brethren in Positions of Responsibility, January 6, 1908; Letter 32, 1908

95. Assuming the book was filed away at the start of Manasseh’s reign (55 years), we can add Amon’s reign (2 years), and the first 18 years of Josiah’s reign. That’s a maximum of 75 years. Long enough to cause plenty of mischief. See 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34.

to believe, sincerely said) on this topic in recent decades does not align well with the historical record of the authority we claim to be representing.

21. *Opinions May Vary*

Have you ever noticed that other people sometimes have ideas that are not the same as your own? Strange, isn't it? It's one thing if they prefer apples to bananas, or blue socks instead of black. But some issues are a lot more important than that, and this whole various opinions thing seems like a stubborn, factory-installed characteristic of humanity. How are we to deal with that?

Fortunately for us, this issue of tithing just continues to present fascinating records that shed light on all this. You see, even in Ellen White's own household, there was a range of thought on how to relate to "the obligation of tithing." Rationally enough, those different ideas were based on the actual experiences, the natural inclinations, and the varying circumstances of the people involved. In other words, it was all a part of normal life.

Let's start with Sara McEnterfer. We met her some pages back, and if you went to the trouble of reading footnote 43 (*perish the thought* that anyone would skip over the footnotes!) you may remember that the SDA Encyclopedia described her as "a book binder, nurse, traveling companion, private secretary, stenographer, typist, and 'executive secretary' who effectively managed Ellen White's household operations, visitors, and travel arrangements." In the world of politics, Sara would be the Chief of Staff. Sara was an organizer, an administrator, the kind of person who, on first sight, sets about eliminating non-linear waterfowl issues⁹⁶ as a matter of principle.

Praise the Lord for people with those skills. That's how stuff gets done. But it's natural for those folks to enjoy simple, consistent policy. "We do it this way. Full stop." No, life doesn't always work that way, but God bless them for trying to wrestle chaos into a workable form. And even if they overshoot the mark now and then, you've got to love them for what they do get done.

That was Sara, and evidently Ellen White wasn't overly concerned if Sara's way of addressing some matters was a bit different from her own. Let's look at a few examples:

Dear Sister,

Your letter to Sister White bearing date of Jan. 21, 1906, is at hand, and in reply to your question I quote from Sister White's writings the following paragraph:

"The tithes and offerings are not the property of any man, but are to be used in doing a certain work for God. Unworthy ministers may receive some of the means thus

96. Ducks are always better when they're kept in a row.

raised, but dare any one, because of this, withhold from the treasury, and brave the curse of God? I dare not. I pay my tithes gladly and freely, saying, as did David, 'Of thine own have we given thee.'... Look at the days and weeks and months of the past, and see if your life service has not been one long, complicated robbery of God, because you have failed to remember him, and have left eternity out of your reckoning. *Special Testimonies*, pp. 27, 33⁹⁷

From the scriptures of course you understand in regard to paying the tithe how it should be done, and from this writing of Sister White's we plainly see that when we have been faithful in paying our tithe in the way that God directs, it is not for us to raise the question in regard to its distribution, and if we are faithful in our duty to Him, he will bless us and make us a blessing in the work that we have to do.⁹⁸

I enjoy digging into details,⁹⁹ but sometimes that can come across as petty and critical. So let's be charitable, and just enjoy the details without any whining. Sara had already answered four letters that day (possibly five, since one is undated, and that's just counting the ones that made it into Willie's letterbook), so let's cut her a little slack. But it's fun to note that the "quoted" "paragraph" (yes, scare quotes around both words, individually) she included in the letter is a bit of a stretch. For starters, it's important to recognize that she put in that ellipsis, not me.

The portion before the ellipsis is drawn from a manuscript primarily addressed to ministers.¹⁰⁰ In fact, the opening sentences read, "My heart has been sad as I have seen so little accomplished by the workers in Michigan. The members of our churches are not incorrigible; the fault is not so much to be charged upon them as upon their teachers. Their ministers do not feed them."

The section after the ellipsis (six pages further on in the *Special Testimonies* compilation Sara was using) is taken from an unrelated letter to Doctor John Harvey Kellogg¹⁰¹ which doesn't actually mention tithe at all. That's not the way I'd have chosen to present the matter, but Sara was trying to make a point, not win a Pulitzer Prize.

Still, the more significant aspect of interest to us just now is Sara's summation statement in the last paragraph. To her mind, the one solid aspect "in regard to paying the tithe" is "how it should be done." To Sara, "paying our tithe in the way that God directs" is the fulfillment of the believer's obligation and

97. Today that reference would be *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1B, 27, 34.

98. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to Mrs. James Swingle, January 31, 1906; W.C. White Letterbook 21B, 102

99. What is perhaps the oddest detail of this letter would have been entirely unrecognized when it was written in 1906: Ellen White's grandson, Arthur Lacey White, who was not born until 1907, would later marry Mrs. Swingle's granddaughter, Frieda Belle Swingle, who was born in 1908.

100. E.G. White, "The Work in Michigan," August 10, 1890; Manuscript 3, 1890. This is a strong statement which deserves careful consideration. We'll get to that, but not at this juncture since I'm tracking Sara's thinking more than analyzing details right now. See Section 24.

101. E.G. White, Letter to J.H. Kellogg, December 24, 1890; Letter 41, 1890

the end of his concern. It's a nice, easy, procedural approach that keeps things running smoothly. That's a good thing. But it's a bit like a square or a triangle, compared to a cube or a tetrahedron.

Sara would run into that extra dimension kind of thing at times. We all bump up against stuff that stretches our thinking now and then. It can be good; it can be painful; but as commonly as anything else, it can be temporary. A new idea comes along, and we see some spark of value in it. But if that spark isn't fanned into a real flame, it tends to die out and we end up more or less back where we started. Fortunately for all of us, God is patient. He takes a long view of history. He has to; after all, it's taken six millennia of "progressive revelation" to make as much progress as you see right now.

And if we want to bring that thought a little closer to home, we could ask ourselves how much of that progress has happened in our own denomination since about the 1860s.¹⁰² Our biggest claim to fame since then came in 1888, with ideas that led to the *beginning* of the *revelation* (not the "*proclamation*") of the loud cry.¹⁰³ Oddly enough, even that wasn't strictly new:

Dr. Waggoner has opened to you precious light, not new, but old light which has been lost sight of by many minds and is now shining forth in clear rays.¹⁰⁴

Humanity's track record has been a painful mix of forward and backward steps. Progress has generally been slow and dearly bought.

But, back to Sara.... I was saying that she—like the rest of us—had her mind stretched at times. These next two letters, a few months apart, provide a classic example of the natural desire for a simple, orderly procedure, coming up against the valid need for flexibility.

Dear Sister,

Your letter of July 1 to Sister White is at hand. She is too feeble just now to look after her correspondence personally so I am writing these few lines for her. We do not know of any place in her writings where any such instruction is given. The plan that we as a people have always followed, is to pay our tithe into the church where we are members, and let it be distributed for the support of the ministry.

Brother White is not at home at present, but when he returns if there is any such instruction in his mother's writings, he will certainly know about it and can correspond with you concerning it.

102. From William Miller's Bible study following the War of 1812, up through the 1860s was like a theological renaissance! Just consider that in that brief window God's people processed "new light" on the 2,300 days, the seven trumpets, the second coming, the state of the dead, the heavenly sanctuary, spiritual gifts, the Sabbath, the mark of the beast, the United States' role in the end of time, and health reform.

103. At the risk of being self-promoting, when it comes to this topic I have to recommend my previous books, *d'Sozo: Reversing the Worst Evil*, and *Diasozo! The Ministry of Controversy and the Great Healing*.

104. E.G. White, "A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word," November 1, 1888; Manuscript 15, 1888

Trusting that the Lord will give you wisdom [as to?] just what course to pursue,
and wishing you much of his blessing, I am
Yours in the Master's service,¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately, I couldn't find any information as to what sort of "instruction" Libbie was asking about. It seems likely that Sara saw the idea as antithetical to "the plan we have always followed as a people." And *that* plan was simple, straight forward, and *the right thing to do*.

What makes this so interesting, and gives us an insight into Sara's perspective on the issue, is the following letter, written two and a half months later:

Dear Sister,

Your letter of September 29 to Sister White enclosing check for ten dollars tithe, is at hand, and we are enclosing receipt for the same. Sister White wished me to say to you that if you desired to send your tithe to some other place besides your own church, she could see no harm in it. Of course, we know that the members are expected to pay their tithe into the church where they belong, and let its officers attend to the rest of the business. This is the regulation of the church, generally.

Sister White wishes me to thank you for the money sent, and she will see that it is appropriated as tithe, where it will do the most good. Sister White herself is not very strong, therefore we are writing these few lines for her.¹⁰⁶

It's kind of funny, actually. Sara just tends to see the issue one way... and pretty much only one way. Despite the direct quote from Ellen White! And it doesn't take an accounting degree to see the advantage of the church working through "official channels." No one would be happy if everyone just started sending their tithe wherever they thought needed it most. The loudest voices, the most emotional appeals, would get all the money! The quiet, patient, hard working souls who may well be doing the best work, would largely be overlooked. Given that it was the "overlooked" workers that Ellen White was trying to help, that would obviously be a disaster. That was Elder Evans argument to Willie White, and it's got real merit!

But if the "regulation of the church" were ever exclusively followed (which, of course, it never has been) then it would be exactly the overlooked ones Ellen White was trying to help who would remain overlooked. What was needed was something squishier than a cube or a tetrahedron, something that could "bend" the regulation in an appropriate way without breaking it. What was needed was a service pretty much exactly like Ellen White was providing.

105. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to Libbie Straight, July 24, 1910; W.C. White Letterbook 21C, 342. The bracketed words "as to" are supplied, because the two words are indecipherable. The available copy of this letter is not signed, but the closing, "Yours in the Master's service," was commonly used by Sara McEnterfer. No one else in the Elmshaven circle seems to have used that phrase in that way.

106. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to Miss Eva Mangott and Sister, October 5, 1910; W.C. White Letterbook 21C, 355

Since we're looking at the variation of ideas, we need to risk a brief anachronism, a "flashback" to an earlier time. It's a risk, but if we keep in mind that the "Rehoboam letters" between W.C. and Elder Evans happened in 1907, and note that the letter we'll look at next is Willie writing in 1904, it will help us understand the reality that people actually do change their ideas sometimes. This letter, to a W.A. McKenzie of Cambridge, Idaho, strikes a happy note.¹⁰⁷

Yours of November 7 came duly to hand. As regards the question of individuals sending tithe to mission fields, I have never felt free to do this, even when I was in a new and needy field.¹⁰⁸ If this practice should be generally adopted it would make much confusion and much misunderstanding as to whether our brethren were bearing their share of the burdens of the Lord's work and as to whether they were doing their duty in the payment of tithes. It seems natural and right that we should pay our tithes to the treasurer of the church to which we belong. This has been advised by those most deeply interested in the general work. In times past, when our home conferences were using their tithe exclusively in home territory, there were always some who felt it their duty to send their tithes to mission fields but more recently as our home conferences are dividing their funds so freely with mission fields, there seems to be but little reason or necessity for doing this. I do not know of any positive statement in the Testimonies that would guide our actions in this matter, but it seems to me that according to the Bible plan of organization, it would be natural for us to pay our tithes to the treasurer of our own church.¹⁰⁹

Great points! Bang on, as they say. I.H. Evans would support this. You can have your own opinion, of course, but I think everyone should support this... under appropriate circumstances. Willie sees that the "home conferences" have adopted a better policy than they had followed at times in the past—the circumstances have changed—so why not work with the system?

No, there isn't any "positive statement in the Testimonies that would guide our actions in this matter" but when things are working well, wouldn't it be natural to keep life simple for everyone involved?

Well, that was 1904.¹¹⁰ The improvement in things was largely attributable to the re-organization of the church's administrative structure that took place at the General Conference session of 1901.¹¹¹ By 1907, Willie had a few concerns,

107. For more about Mr. McKenzie's circumstances, see the sidebar on page 53.

108. Willie was probably thinking of his time in Australasia. In a letter written nine years later, he mentions what sounds like a different policy while he and his mother were in Europe. See page 59.

109. W.C. White, Letter to W.A. McKenzie, December 2, 1904; W.C. White Letterbook 24, 483

110. Coincidentally, this was the same year that the sisters in Grand Junction, Colorado, gave their tithe to the Southern Missionary Society, which was what concerned Elder Watson so much that Ellen White wrote her famous letter to him. Willie saw things as getting better; maybe Colorado was lagging a bit in this regard, or perhaps the sisters who gave the money just had a different perspective.

111. In this particular world, of course, almost nothing is *all* good or *all* bad. At the end of that 1901 GC session, Ellen White had marveled, "If any people have reason to praise God, we have. Angels of God have

which we already looked at in his correspondence with the General Conference Treasurer. He was a rational guy. He was willing to take a common sense approach to such matters, even at the risk of appearing a bit vacillating.

And he refused to get stuck in any rut! 1907 wasn't the same as 1904, so use a little common sense. But 1909 and 1910 weren't the same as 1907, so he felt free to shift his position once again!

Dear Brother,

I have your letter of March 23, accompanied by copy of a letter which Mother wrote to Elder Watson, January 22, 1906. I have had a number of questions regarding this letter. It was written at a time when the Colorado Conference was doing very little for fields outside. Since that time the Colorado Conference and many others have been sharing their tithe with the more needy fields, and in view of this fact, it is a great pleasure to recommend all their people to pay their tithe to the treasurer of their home church.¹¹²

Elder Hartwell was the vice-president of the West Michigan Conference at that time, so he was likely looking for wisdom as to how best to respond to questions coming to him from confused church members. A seriously warped application of the Watson letter had been used as a point of attack against Ellen White and the General Conference by C.E. Stewart, Dr. Kellogg's primary hit-man. Stewart's wannabe *expose*¹¹³ of everything he thought was wrong with Ellen White had come out in October 1907. A year and a half later, Hartwell was apparently still dealing with the influence of Stewart's nonsense.

In 1910, things were still going reasonably well. Not *perfectly well*, but at least reasonably well. There were still glitches, but nothing so obnoxious as to call for any adjustment in Willie's position. So, given a similar question, he gave the same answer.

been at work here.... We have been trying to organize the work on right lines. The Lord has sent his angels to minister unto us who are heirs of salvation, telling us how to carry the work forward." *General Conference Bulletin*, April 25, 1901

But twenty-one months later she would lament, "The result of the last General Conference has been the greatest, the most terrible sorrow of my life. No change was made. The spirit that should have been brought into the whole work as the result of that meeting was not brought in because men did not receive the testimonies of the Spirit of God. As they went to their several fields of labor, they did not walk in the light that the Lord had flashed upon their pathway, but carried into their work the wrong principles that had been prevailing in the work at Battle Creek." E.G. White, Letter to Judge Jesse Arthur, January 4, 1903; Letter 17, 1903

112. W.C. White, Letter to S.D. Hartwell, April 4, 1909; W.C. White Letterbook 37, 915.

113. Far from destroying Ellen White's credibility (which appears to have been Stewart's goal), his letter and subsequent book preserved for us the internal records of the aborted project of building a grandiose "teaching hospital" in Chicago. In her opposition to the idea, Ellen White specifically says that the "object lesson for our people" provided by the Chicago experience was applicable "in regard to building in Los Angeles." E.G. White, "The Chicago Work," March 20, 1906; Manuscript 33, 1906. The significance of all this in 1907 and beyond is discussed in my book, *d'Sozo: Reversing the Worst Evil*.

SIDEBAR: ADVENT GULCH

The Mr. W.A. McKenzie mentioned on page 51 provides occasion to consider one of the more colorful stories of the Adventist expansion to the west in the late 1800s. It seems that a number of church members, apparently from a wide area spread across the Upper Midwest and the Central Plains, had been targeted by a con artist claiming to have a map that would lead them to a gold strike in the mountains of Idaho.

Some time in 1900, the group assembled near Cambridge, Idaho, a dry, sparsely treed region of rolling hills rising sharply toward the 8,000-foot-high Hitt Mountain Range a few miles to the west. The “leader” of the group came under pressure at that time to share his secret treasure map with the others. Why hadn’t this been done before? Well, it appears that the group trusted him, not only as far as the map was concerned, but with the whole of their collective wealth!

The “leader” agreed to show them the map after breakfast the next morning, but absconded with all their money in the dark of night. Naturally this raises a question: *Was this guy an Adventist?*

For whatever reasons, the group seems to have never publicly disclosed the name of the disgraced “leader,” but the fact that he had successfully targeted specific families across Adventist churches in several states certainly doesn’t look good on that point.

Left with nothing but what they had in their wagons, and no money to speak of to supplement their standard of living, the group settled right where they were, planted crops and orchards, built houses, and created overnight the largest concentration of Seventh-day Adventists in Idaho.¹¹⁴ Before the Idaho Conference built its first academy in Caldwell, Idaho, the conference committee came to Advent Gulch to check out the lay of the land as this was the largest concentration of Adventist children in the conference, but it was eventually decided the gulch was too remote and small for an academy.¹¹⁵ That little corner of the world is still known as Advent Gulch. You can find it on Google Maps.

Was W.A. McKenzie a member of the group that got swindled? I couldn’t tell for sure. The group is said to have arrived there sometime in 1900. The U.S. Census of that year lists his address as Salubria, Idaho—less than eight miles southwest of Advent Gulch.¹¹⁶ So... maybe.

114. stewardship.adventist.org/2012-16-4-true-treasure

115. nwadventists.com/news/2017/02/help-needed-advent-gulch-history-project

116. wikitree.com/wiki/McKenzie-4055

Dear Sister,

I have been requested to write to you in answer to your letter of October 31 to my mother, Mrs. E.G.White. You have asked if it would be right for you to pay your tithe to Prof. P.T. Magan of Madison, Tenn. Mother feels a deep interest in the Madison School. She has great confidence in the work being done there, but she also feels that it is a wise plan for our people to pay their tithe to the treasurer of the church where they live. There was a time some years ago when our strong Conferences were not giving the support that they ought to do to missionary fields, but during the last few years they have been giving more and more, and I think the Nebraska Conference is one of those that is sending a large part of its tithe to the mission fields. This places a new obligation upon our people to pay their tithe regularly to the treasurers of the churches where they live.¹¹⁷

In both his letter to Elder Hartwell and his letter to Mrs. Douglass, W.C. made a point of basing his advice on the then-current performance of the local conferences in question. That was Colorado in the letter to Hartwell (because of its involvement in the Watson letter) and Nebraska in the letter to Mrs. Douglass (since she lived in Red Cloud). As the old saying goes, all politics (even church politics, it seems) is local.

Some pages back I mentioned “charitable skepticism” as my rule of thumb when it comes to humanity. The two elements of the term are intended as a bit of an oxymoron. I kind of like the tension that creates. But even more, I like it when skepticism is vanquished and charitability becomes an obviously rational response rather than a Christian duty. In other words, I like happy endings as much as the next guy. And we’ve got one!

Let’s go back to Sara McEnterfer, with all her multi-faceted administrative ability and certifiable “hold-the-fort-ness.” Sara was a jewel who worked with and supported Ellen White for thirty-one years. She was good at what she did, and she had a strong personality of her own. But more impressive than that, she could learn new things.¹¹⁸ She could consider new ideas. I think these are great traits, and so let’s close this section with a hat tip to Sara for what she would write in 1914—

It seems to us that this matter of tithe-paying is a personal matter between the individual and his God. When a minister has instructed the people according to the Bible, concerning tithing, which we believe is very plainly laid out in the word of God, and has encouraged them to be faithful in this matter, it seems that he has little further responsibility. In the Bible we are instructed not to do our alms before men, to be seen of them. We are also told not to let the right hand know what the left hand doeth. And to the people God says, Bring ye all the tithe into the storehouse, and

117. W.C. White, Letter to Mrs. E.N. Douglass, January 3, 1910; White Estate Archives Document 028035

118. You may have heard the sad story of the time Sarah tried to be helpful by canning some fruit for the winter. She learned that those little rubber rings were a necessary part of the process!

prove me now herewith, etc. We believe this is speaking to each individual heart, and that it is a personal matter between God and each of His children, and therefore unnecessary to be made public. All should feel it a privilege to pay God that which is His, and thereby receive the blessing that He has in store for them, for He is faithful to perform all that He has promised.

May the Lord help us individually to keep our accounts straight with our Father in heaven.¹¹⁹

22. *All Oppression Shall Cease*

That heading isn't strictly Biblical. It comes from a song, not a prophet. You've no doubt heard *O Holy Night*, and it's the third stanza that I pulled that heading from. The full lyric reads like this: "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, and in His name all oppression shall cease."

The centerpiece of this section, a lengthy extract from a letter written by Willie White, addresses oppression. Probably not the kind of oppression you might be expecting, but it's tied in with this whole muddle surrounding tithe, and I think it makes a point that deserves more attention than we give it.

But first, let's pick up a few of the genuinely Biblical pronouncements on the subject just to kind of set the stage and refresh our thinking as to what the Lord thinks about oppression.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these. For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever."¹²⁰

That's a promise. It's meant to give hope. But it's pretty heavily loaded with conditions, and one might surmise, implied rebuke. By and large, that's the kind of context in which "oppression" comes up in the old testament

The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.¹²¹

Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take

119. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to John C. McChesney, April 19, 1914; White Estate Archives Document 037643

120. Jeremiah 7:3–7

121. Ezekiel 22:29

them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.¹²²

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.¹²³

“Oppression” is a misuse of power against those who are nearly, if not entirely, helpless. The system is stacked against them by poverty or politics or some other brand of power, and God seems to take any kind of injustice to the powerless very seriously. So seriously, in fact, that in the case we are about to consider the basic issues of doing justly and loving mercy took center stage.

Before we jump into the story, a little introduction of the setting will be helpful. Elder Stewart Kime was, in 1913, the president of the North Carolina Conference. About twenty miles south of Ashville, and ten miles north of Hendersonville, was the little town of Naples. About a mile away was a property on which Professor Sidney Brownsburger and his wife were heading up efforts to operate a school on the same general principles as the more well known Madison College. Given that Brownsberger had been the first president of Battle Creek College nearly four decades previous, as well as the first president of Healdsburg College three decades previous, and considering that he was sixty-eight years old, it was a brave undertaking to build another school from scratch.

The Naples Agricultural and Normal School¹²⁴ faced many challenges. Working with people, I think that’s something of a baseline, a norm. I’m going to guess that some of their problems were of their own making, and some were provided free of charge by others. Sadly, but unsurprisingly, money was central to some of those problems. The denomination still faced the need to take in, and equitably send out, the donated funds which paid all her bills. The specter of “What if everyone sent their money wherever they wanted to” still haunted the uneasy dreams of good people just trying to guarantee the prosperity of the Lord’s work.

In those circumstances, it was easy to see a great gulf fixed between a denominationally owned institution and an independent operation over which the church had no legal control. Seeing beyond that barrier was... hard.

With these circumstances as the backdrop, we start with a letter from Elder Kime to W.C. White:

122. Micah 2:1–2

123. Zechariah 7:9–10

124. Known today as Fletcher Academy.

I want to also ask you another favor. I will quote from a letter just received and you can see why I am asking this favor. I see grave danger in the principle laid down. I have taken the position that the tithe was for the support of the Gospel ministry and that he who diverts the tithe to other channels¹²⁵ is not paying tithe but making offerings. I have contended that no person whatsoever had a right to put their tithe where they may choose. If I am and have been wrong I am ready to retract.

[From] a letter dated July 10, 1913, I quote, "In the general proposition which you state in regard to the tithe going to the support of the ministry you are correct. Yet there have been, ARE, and always will be exceptions to this rule. Sister White herself has sent tithe to some people struggling to carry on work that was not recognized by the organized work. She has authorized others to do the same thing."

Now if this is the case and it is right I do not see why all may not choose the object on which they will bestow their tithe and place it there. I have in my home three orphans, have I the right to take my tithe to support these orphans? Last year at camp meeting a brother contended that he had a number of orphans in his home and that was why he paid no tithe. He was using it to keep them. When I hold a series of meetings I often find people paying tithe but they use it to do charity and I always tell them that they ought to pay it to the treasury for the support of the ministry¹²⁶ and that they should do all their charity aside from the tithe. I want to be right on this question.

The statement [quoted above] was made in reply to a letter written to the supporters of the Naples school. The promoters seem to think as they are engaged in a work of charity that they are released from paying tithe. They use the above quotation to sustain and justify themselves in the position. I claim that I cannot recommend students to go where such doctrine is held, either in theory or practice, to get their education. I can see destruction to the whole system of tithing in this thing. If I see things that do not exist, I want to be helped to see the right.¹²⁷

Elder Kime was not irrational. The destruction of the whole tithing system would not be a good thing, but the reality of the situation never presented such a starkly binary choice as to allow for no possibilities but a monopoly on tithe strictly for the "organized work" or the total disintegration of the "regular channels." Hidden somewhere behind the longed-for "guaranteed prosperity" of the work, were "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith."¹²⁸

125. Notice that Elder Kime sees the "channel" used to "support the gospel ministry" as a uniquely sufficient identifier of that support. In other words, anything within that channel was support, and anything outside that channel was an "offering"—a potentially good thing, but categorically distinct.

126. Elder Kime sees the perfectly valid "normal" approach of paying one's tithe "to the treasury for the support of the ministry" as "tithe." All else is "charity aside from the tithe."

127. Stewart Kime, Letter to W.C. White, July 15, 1913; White Estate Archives Document 033467

128. Matthew 23:23

The difficulty, as always, comes when justice and mercy carry a price tag larger than our faith in God's provision is prepared to accept. That challenge will always be too great for any of us to bear unless we have learned some basic lessons of dependence on God—not only dependence for money or whatever else we might need, but also dependence on Him to know His will so we don't go running up inappropriate expenses!¹²⁹ Neither an economy which neglects and oppresses others, nor an extravagance which wastes what God has provided, is the Lord's plan. We may be called to feed the five thousand by faith, but we are just as surely called to gather up the fragments that remain.

In due time, Elder White responded to Elder Kime's letter:

When I came north from Florida, I turned west at Salisbury and made short visits to our brethren in Eufola, Hildebran, Baker's Mountain, Chattanooga, Graysville, Huntsville, and Madison.¹³⁰

At Naples I had an opportunity to see something of how the brethren were getting along. I was very pleased to see that the farm and the buildings had been improved little by little, and that there was good opportunity for school work providing a competent faculty could be secured and students should be encouraged to attend.

Professor Brownsberger told me something of his financial struggles, and I saw that he has had but little money to handle during the year. He told me with regret that he had not paid tithe and that he had had almost nothing on which to pay tithe. He opened the way for me to give him a lecture on tithe-paying, but I could not do it, for I felt that it would be too much along the line of oppression and of dictating to another man how he should meet his obligations to God.

It is impossible for me to forget some of the controversies among our brethren in the '70s over the tithe-paying of ministers. I remember how our brethren came to Mother for counsel and advice. At one time at a camp-meeting in Wisconsin a deputation of influential men asked her if our ministers ought not to pay tithe as an example to others, and her answer was, "No, indeed; not as you treat them now. You give them barely enough to live on, and in some cases not enough, so they are tempted to beg or to deprive their families of the necessities of life, and so long as you treat them thus, it would be oppression to insist upon their paying a tithe of their small income." Later on the brethren came with another proposition, and they said if we dealt more liberally with our ministers and paid them better wages, then would it not be well for them to pay their tithe as an example to others? And Mother said, "Certainly."

It seems to me that Brownsberger and other teachers, doing the same class of work, are very much on the same footing as our ministers were in '77 and '78¹³¹ and that the right or wrong of their paying tithe depends very largely upon the way in

129. As with most roads, there are at least two ditches (and an indeterminate number of satanic potholes).

While too little trust is probably the more common, the presumption that leads to excess is perfectly acceptable for the devil's purposes. The latter was a significant weakness of Dr. Kellogg, for instance.

130. Small, recently established schools were located at each of these sites.

which their brethren relate themselves to these men and their work. The same principle should be considered in our dealings with Brethren Johnston, Sonborn, and others who are currying heavy burdens in behalf of orphans, which burden ought to be shared by their brethren, and heavy burdens in maintaining mission schools, which burdens ought to be shared by their brethren.

When Mother and I were in Europe, and our church membership was in Oakland, California, we paid our tithe to the work in Europe, which was infinitely more in need of it than was the California Conference. And when the president of the Colorado Conference was threatening to make a great stir because some sisters in Western Colorado who were dissatisfied with his administration sent several hundred dollars of their tithe to the needy work among the colored people in the south, Mother advised him to keep quiet, and stated that she had been authorized under extraordinary circumstances to use her tithe in behalf of worthy workers who were being neglected.

Notwithstanding this instruction, Mother has paid tithe regularly on what she has received from the Conference.

But from what I have heard her say in years past I am confident that if our Conference Committee men should bring before her the cases of some of our missionary workers such as Brownsberger and M.H. Johnston, that she would say that any one who would press upon them the duty of tithe paying would please God better by making an earnest effort to help them in the self-sacrificing work they are trying to do.

This letter is not written for publication nor to cause controversy.¹³² It is an honest, sincere effort to answer what I regard as an honest, sincere question as to what is right in our relation to men who have placed themselves in a hard spot for the sake of doing good to others who are really in need of help.¹³³

A faithful tithe—whether it be from a paycheck or from a garden of “mint and anise and cumin”—is important. God asks that we return it to Him, but in all that, we need to remember the weightier matters of the law as well: justice and mercy and faith.

131. More standardized policy in regard to ministerial salaries has helped alleviate these concerns within the North American Division. See “Why Some Adventist Pastors May Retire as Millionaires,” which reports a “study [that] revealed that over half of the surveyed pastors anticipate retiring as millionaires and the average anticipated net worth was 1.5 million dollars.” nadministerial.com/stories/2023/1/12/why-some-adventist-pastors-may-retire-as-millionaires or web.archive.org/web/20250223022618/http://nadministerial.com/stories/2023/1/12/why-some-adventist-pastors-may-retire-as-millionaires. Comparisons with other parts of the world are challenging in many ways, but it seems likely that this condition of things will likely raise questions among employees in other regions.

132. It’s a fair question as to whether the passage of 113 years justifies my publication of this letter. I pondered that some before including it. I like to think that I dislike needless controversy nearly as much as Willie White, so the question to my mind was, “Is this likely to be any sort of a blessing, or just one more rock for people to throw at someone who disagrees with their understanding of church finance?”

In my defense, I suppose I can point out that the White Estate saw fit to publish it before I did. If that makes anyone less inclined to throw rocks at me (or anyone else) then I guess I made the right choice.

133. W.C. White, Letter to Stewart Kime, August 11, 1913; White Estate Archives Document 033468

23. $> 0 < 1$ ¹³⁴

I don't mean to be facetious, or unnecessarily controversial, and certainly not heretical, but have you ever wondered how all the data in the books of heaven gets recorded? I like the visual of the angel with the big feather pen as much as the next guy, but do you really think that's how it's done?

Granted, God could make all the books and pens and ink that was needed, and I'm sure there's someplace somewhere in the universe with enough space to store a few hundred billion massive ledgers... but... *really*?

Until recently—within the lifetime of many living today—something of that sort was state of the art. Just write it down and store it on a shelf. Now, of course, the options are vastly more numerous. We've got ROM's and hard drives and SSD's and jump sticks and the cloud. We've got compression algorithms to make it all more compact, encryption to keep it private, and maybe someday we'll have quantum systems to do whatever it is they're supposed to do. Ever wonder how God keeps track of it all?

I don't know how He does it, so no big revelations coming on that front. But I do want to promote the advantages of an analog system over a binary one. Unless you're very young, you've probably seen something that was not digital. Old clocks, for instance. The kind that have numbers that don't change, and those pointy things sticking out from the center of a circle. They're called "hands," and if you watch the skinniest one, you can actually see it moving. Moving smoothly, not bouncing every second.

That's an analog device, because if you took a picture of it, you could capture that "second hand" (that doesn't mean "used") *in between* the marks for the seconds. You can't do that with a digital clock.

True enough, some digital clocks have another set of numbers to show hundredths of a second, and that's arguably more precise than trying to guess where that second hand is. But when we take that whole analogy over to the world of theology and church policy, we almost never have anything to indicate even a single decimal point. And if we're thinking digitally, all that's left is 1's and 0's. Sometimes that's good, and sometimes it isn't. I'll explain.

When it comes to the Ten Commandments, that "all or nothing" perspective works well. After all, "whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."¹³⁵ And the closely related topic of salvation works down to only two camps when "He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."¹³⁶

134. For readers who aren't really big on math, that's "greater than zero, less than one."

135. James 2:19

136. Matthew 25:33

But that's not what I have in mind. I'm thinking of the practical benefit to the church when we follow the course Sara McEnterfer outlined. The same course Ellen White outlined. The way the Adventist church used to work on a number of issues. Sara said it like this:

It seems to us¹³⁷ that this matter of tithe-paying is a personal matter between the individual and his God.... We believe this is speaking to each individual heart, and that it is a personal matter between God and each of His children, and therefore unnecessary to be made public.¹³⁸

Ellen White said it like this:

The Jewish rulers recognized the obligation of tithing, and this was right; but they did not leave the people to carry out their own convictions of duty. Arbitrary rules were laid down for every case.¹³⁹

And back in the day, there was a time when believers in good standing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church could see things differently without immediately feeling the need to denounce (at least) or disfellowship (even better) each other. Things were a bit more analog. You could find people who held a position in between zero and one.

No, I'm not advocating any wholesale abandonment of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. I'd be happy if we could just stop trying to *make everything a censurable offense*. It's probably pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking, but I miss the idea that the Bible is our rule of faith, and that maybe, just maybe, we could leave it at that instead of waxing eloquent telling the world (and each other, of course) exactly what the Bible says (or at least what we think the Bible says) about ever increasingly detailed matters.

Charitable skepticism leads me to question the odds of anyone getting these fine points *just exactly, precisely, completely, and unarguably correct*.¹⁴⁰ Even if I

137. This use of the royal or editorial plural implies that she saw her comment as faithfully reflecting the whole of the "Elmshaven establishment."

138. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to John C. McChesney, April 19, 1914; White Estate Archives Document 037643. This is quoted more completely on page 55.

139. *Desire of Ages*, 616. This is quoted more completely on page 39

140. For most of my life, one of the hot button theological issues within Adventism was the human nature of Christ. Did He have a fallen nature or an unfallen nature? The driving force behind the discussion was significant, as the position one held on that question often served as a proxy measure for how committed one might be to the idea that obedience was both desirable and possible.

But after engaging in that particular discussion for a few decades, it struck me that I couldn't actually say what a "human nature" was, let alone specify the difference between the fallen and unfallen versions. Is it genetic? Is it epigenetic? Is it physical at all? Or is it mental? Perhaps it belongs in a separate, non-physical, non-mental category, something more "spiritual"? Does "human nature" depend in any way upon some body organ? Is it the prefrontal cortex? Did Phineas Gage cease to be human after that tamping rod blasted through his skull? What about the estimated 60,000+ patients who were subjected to the once-popular surgical lobotomy? Did they still have a human nature?

think I've explained something to the final degree of perfection, I'm pretty sure other equally good and equally intelligent people might have a slightly different perspective. Do I really need to anathematize them because of that?

But That's Not All!

Far more important than the dynamics of that kind of personal interaction is the impact this kind of binary thinking has on the church as a whole. I believe wholeheartedly that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's church, but everything from the message to Laodicea on down tells my common sense that our standing falls somewhere between a 0 and a 1. We aren't Babylon, but we aren't so solidly in the "holy" and "righteous" category that I would want to wake up tomorrow and hear the Lord say "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still."

The devil would have us stuck in a binary mentality. And, as we have seen, as much or more than in most any other arena this shows up in our policy relating to tithe. When we take the position that the denominational channel is the only "regular channel," when we say that only the "organized work" constitutes "the storehouse" (singular, exclusive of all else), it deactivates the church's early warning system.

What...?

OK, so if that's not intuitively obvious, let me explain. Bear in mind, I'm explaining in principle; the numbers are made up strictly for illustrative purposes.

Suppose the church was as perfect as humanly possible. Would anyone have any good reason to claim that they had "lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe"?

Obviously not. All is good. And anyone who complains is clearly a blemish on the face of the otherwise perfect church. They really are reprobate, and should probably be dropped from membership.

Now, suppose the church was really good, but about 10% of what was done was either mistaken or heretical. Would anyone have any good reason to claim that they had "lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe"? If the answer to that question is "Obviously not," then anyone who does complain should be disfellowshipped.

Now, suppose the church was pretty good, but about 30% of what was done was either mistaken or heretical. Would anyone have any good reason to claim that they had "lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe"? If the answer to that question is "Obviously not," then anyone who complains should be disfellowshipped.

Given these questions, I remain skeptical that any of us are going to completely master the topic any time soon. There are other topics which display the same sort of complexity, and yet the hubris of human nature (presumably the fallen variety) continues to pretend that we know all about them.

You get the pattern. Once our status as the “chosen people” is allowed to override actual concern, there’s no logical stopping point. What if the church were 60% mistaken or heretical? *Same answer.* 80%? *Same answer.*

But let’s try a different take on that.

Suppose the church was really good, but about 10% of what was done was either mistaken or heretical. Let’s pretend that 10% of church members “lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe.” What would they do?

Well, they would likely look for a common sense means to fund areas of the work that seem to them to be neglected (many third world countries might come to mind) or some aspect of the work that appears to them to be a more worthy use of tithe funds. A good portion of that 10% would likely find something other than the “regular channel” through which they could return their tithe to God’s work. The church member’s immediate problem would be solved, but the mistakes or heresy would continue on. Unless someone caught on and did something helpful.

Any savvy treasurer at any level of denominational service who suddenly saw a 10% decrease in tithe should sit up, take notice, and ideally go to work to identify an area of concern which could be rectified, allowing the church to regain the confidence of all its members.

That’s the way we want this to work.

But suppose the treasurer didn’t connect the dots, so let’s pretend that things went down hill. Now about 30% of the church’s doings are mistaken or heretical, so about 30% of members lose confidence in the appropriation of the tithe. Would a 30% drop in revenue catch someone’s attention? How about 60%?

This would provide just about the most tangible, measurable, documentable early warning feed-back loop you could possibly ask for.

But you have to ask for it... or at least allow it. And when we do away with the whole analog system in the name of “orthodoxy,” we lose our best opportunity to defuse potentially explosive situations. Willie White’s citing of Rehoboam comes to mind. There are conditions under which even the Lord does not care to prevent the natural results of human foolishness and arrogance.

Had Rehoboam and his inexperienced counselors understood the divine will concerning Israel, they would have listened to the request of the people for decided reforms in the administration of the government. But in the hour of opportunity that came to them during the meeting in Shechem, they failed to reason from cause to effect, and thus forever weakened their influence over a large number of the people. Their expressed determination to perpetuate and add to the oppression introduced during Solomon’s reign was in direct conflict with God’s plan for Israel, and gave the people ample occasion to doubt the sincerity of their motives. In this unwise and un-

feeling attempt to exercise power, the king and his chosen counselors revealed the pride of position and authority....

When Rehoboam saw the ten tribes withdrawing their allegiance from him, he was aroused to action. Through one of the influential men of his kingdom, "Adoram, who was over the tribute," he made an effort to conciliate them. But the ambassador of peace received treatment which bore witness to the feeling against Rehoboam. "All Israel stoned him with stones, that he died." Startled by this evidence of the strength of revolt, "King Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem."¹⁴¹

I'm sure that quoting those two paragraphs like that may strike some as unwise and unhelpful. That's fair. It would make a great topic for a friendly discussion that might conceivably benefit all participants. That would be helpful. But in a binary system, a difference of opinion like that ends up making nothing more than a very childish reason for slinging anathemas. From either side.

24. *A Loose End*

Back on page 48, in a letter written by Sara McEnterfer, we saw a statement from Ellen White that is very strongly worded. For this alone, if nothing else, we ought to give it some thought:

The tithes and offerings are not the property of any man, but are to be used in doing a certain work for God. Unworthy ministers may receive some of the means thus raised, but dare any one, because of this, withhold from the treasury, and brave the curse of God? I dare not. I pay my tithes gladly and freely, saying, as did David, "Of thine own have we given thee."¹⁴²

Sara's primary point was that the tithe is special. It's sacred. It demands a level of attention and respect that is higher than other funds. Sixty-six pages into this publication, I'd hope that much is considered beyond dispute. But I think Sara saw something more than that in this statement. It seems to me that—at that point in her life—Sara believed Ellen White's words meant that the unworthy ministers were not a concern of the church member. She put it this way:

From the scriptures of course you understand in regard to paying the tithe how it should be done, and from this writing of Sister White's we plainly see that when we have been faithful in paying our tithe in the way that God directs, it is not for us to raise the question in regard to its distribution.¹⁴³

I dislike putting words in someone's mouth, even if (in some ways, *especially if*) they're no longer able to offer a correction, but I believe Sara meant that as long as church members used the "regular channel" to return tithe to God, they

141. *Prophets and Kings*, 91

142. *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1b, 27

143. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to Mrs. James Swingle, January 31, 1906; W.C. White Letterbook 21B, 102

had no need to concern themselves with how it was “distributed,” even if it went to “unworthy ministers.”

This general position was reinforced in several of Sara’s letters that we’ve already looked at, so I don’t think I’m doing her any injustice in describing her position as I have. Of course, we also saw that her position evolved somewhat over the years, but our focus just now is *this* position.

And I agree with her. In thousands, millions of cases, I have no doubt that something very much like what Sara wrote is the best way to deal with the question. Seriously, what would you say to a twelve-year-old convert fresh out of the baptistery? What would you say to a sweet little old retiree who lives a faithful life of Christian service to the circle of her acquaintances, but who wouldn’t know how to navigate past the outskirts of the town in which she was born seventy-five years before? What would you say to a convert in the tribal highlands of Papua New Guinea?

What would you say to anyone who had never contemplated the possibility that there may actually *be* “unworthy ministers” employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Whatever else you might say to that general category of church members, I’m going to say I think there’s a good chance it’s the wrong thing to say. I don’t think Jesus would go any deeper than that with that audience. Not without laying some pretty extensive groundwork on other points first. The principle of, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now,”¹⁴⁴ still applies.

But is Sara’s conclusion the only conclusion one might come to? Well, this far into a book like this... I don’t think you’re thinking that, either. So let’s map that out as well.

On the broad front, taking that “turn it over and forget it” position as the one and only truth about tithe is a direct violation of personal responsibility. We saw this a while ago:

God desires to bring men into direct relation with Himself. In all His dealings with human beings He recognizes the principle of personal responsibility. He seeks to encourage a sense of personal dependence and to impress the need of personal guidance. He desires to bring the human into association with the divine, that men may be transformed into the divine likeness. Satan works to thwart this purpose. He seeks to encourage dependence upon men.¹⁴⁵

I like the way she said that: “God desires....” That’s the goal, but He “desires” rather than “demands.” It takes some time, some maturity, some knowledge.

144. John 16:12

145. *Ministry of Healing*, 242

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.¹⁴⁶

There's a time for growing up, too! For learning enough to be useful in more and greater ways. So let's assume we're dealing with people who aren't green as grass, people with enough good sense that they won't go off half cocked the first time they learn something the least bit challenging or unsettling. What's the best answer for their inquiries about stewardship?

Those Sabbathkeeping brethren who shift the responsibility of their stewardship into the hands of their wives, while they themselves are capable of managing the same, are unwise and in the transfer displease God. The stewardship of the husband cannot be transferred to the wife. Yet this is sometimes attempted, to the great injury of both.¹⁴⁷

No man is to merge his individuality in that of any other man. No man should be urged to make another man his steward. There are diversities of gifts, and a large work to be done in our world in the use of God's entrusted goods. Let us never forget that we are here to be fashioned by the hand of God, fitted to do the work He has given us to do. That work is our own, the accountability is our own; it cannot be transferred to another. Let not human agents interpose to take another's work out of the hands of God into their own finite hands.¹⁴⁸

Neither of these last two statements is focused on tithe as such, but some people have a hard time convincing themselves that in God's perfect ideal there is no overlap between stewardship of land and skills, and the stewardship involved in returning a faithful tithe. Who is to say that their concern, their conviction, is not God's leading *for them*?

But the larger problem with interpreting Ellen White's "I dare not..." statement as a condemnation of anyone who has chosen to return tithe through something other than the "regular channel" is simply that if that's what Ellen White meant, then every time she accepted tithe from Lucy or Walter or any of the rest, she was complicit in doing that which she said she wouldn't dare to do!

To come to that conclusion also requires one other step: You've got to strip the statement out of both it's immediate and larger context. Let's go with "immediate" first. Here is that statement in the context of the full paragraph (which is actually the way it is presented in the *Special Testimonies*):

You who have been withholding your means from the cause of God, read the book of Malachi, and see what is spoken there in regard to tithes and offerings. Cannot you see that it is not best under any circumstances to withhold your tithes and offerings because you are not in harmony with everything your brethren do? The tithes and offerings are not the property of any man, but are to be used in doing a certain work for God. Unwor-

146. Ecclesiastes 3:1

147. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, 528

148. E.G. White, Letter to O.A. Olsen, September 19, 1895; Letter 54, 1895

thy ministers may receive some of the means thus raised, but dare any one, because of this, withhold from the treasury, and brave the curse of God? I dare not. I pay my tithes gladly and freely, saying, as did David, "Of thine own have we given thee." A selfish withholding from God will tend to poverty in our own souls. Act your part, my brethren and sisters. God loves you, and he stands at the helm. If the Conference business is not managed according to the order of the Lord, that is the sin of the erring ones. The Lord will not hold you responsible for it, if you do what you can to correct the evil. But do not commit sin yourselves by withholding from God his own property. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently," or deceitfully.¹⁴⁹

This was mentioned before: "withholding tithe" is not the same as returning tithe through a different channel. "Withholding tithe" is "not returning tithe."

And as to the part about not being responsible because you've passed that burden on to someone else, the last part of the same paragraph puts a notable condition on that: "if you do what you can to correct the evil." If Lucy Gravelle's case is any guide, that would mean going to the brethren to "encourage them to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God."¹⁵⁰

What's even more interesting is that this passage from *Special Testimonies* goes further in spelling out what that encouragement would include. Lucy got nothing more than a hint, really, but this manuscript gets down to where the rubber meets the road. And, it turns out, those "unworthy ministers" are not something to ignore.

The true ambassador of Christ is not given to jesting, to trifling, idle talk, for the word of God condemns this: but he is cheerful, showing forth the praises of Him who has called him out of darkness into his marvelous light. Every minister who after his discourse will engage in frivolous conversation, counteracts all the influence of his words in the sacred desk. He does no honor to God or to the truth, but brings the most sacred things down upon a level with common things, and makes of no effect the truth of heavenly origin. Those who do not walk by the rule laid down by the word of God should be faithfully admonished, and if they fail to reform, should be deprived of their license or credentials. Otherwise the Conference that has sanctioned the labors of these men will share their guilt. It is a mercy to the unfaithful laborer himself to remove him from his position, for the rebuke of God is upon him. It is a duty enjoined by Heaven, that souls may not be contaminated by the unholy spiritual atmosphere which surrounds him. You should not cast him off as a reprobate, but let your dealing with him show him that he has mistaken his calling. The Lord has laid no such burden upon him, or if he has, the man has never taken it....

Money is drawn from the Lord's treasury to support those who are unconverted, and need that one teach them the first principles of the gospel, which is Christ formed

149. *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1b, 27

150. E.G. White, Letter to Sister J.J. Gravelle, December 29, 1911; Letter 96, 1911

within, the hope of glory. When the laborers who are so lacking in spirituality believe in Christ, it will be manifest that they possess the faith that works by love and purifies the soul.... I have felt anguish of soul as I have thus seen the true state of things.¹⁵¹

Now I don't believe for a minute that every church member who has a concern with this or that pastor, or whatever else, is well suited to laboring with the leading brethren about how they ought to be removing licenses and credentials. Lucy Gravelle wasn't your average church member. But an over-the-top application of a document in one direction often has a tendency to inspire something of the same in the opposite direction.

If the matter of tithe gets turned into a food fight over firing pastors, there's no way it will end well. And from the position of those honestly trying to purify and defend the "regular channel" (a truly noble, albeit challenging, endeavor) it seems to me that the last thing anyone should do would be to create a pool of well respected, unemployed Seventh-day Adventist ministers whose work has been made unjustly difficult. Such a development would inevitably come to function as a "new channel" tithe magnet. I don't know anyone in their right mind who thinks that should be our first choice.

25. The Life and Trials of Dan and Amelia Shireman

Before going any further with our main line of thought, we need to consider at least a thumbnail sketch of the key actors and issues in this part of the drama. That means introducing Dan Shireman and his wife, Amelia.

To get any just understanding of their influence in the South, and to understand the movement they launched, we have to start with Dan's mother dying when he was four, and his father being killed in a train explosion when he was seven. As an orphan, Dan learned to sleep "in the woods and in barns, on haystacks and on lumber piles." Rather than getting bitter, Dan determined to help others.

Dan's education focused on practical, trades related skills—carpentry, mechanics, masonry and the like. In 1858, about a year after he married Amelia, they attended Adventist evangelistic meetings and accepted the Sabbath. In the 1860s, their first missionary effort had less than astounding results, but they did plant the Advent message in the heart of Mary Jane Daniells and her young son A.G. Daniells, who grew up to become the longest serving General Conference president.

The unique element in the Shireman's ministry was its emphasis on a more hands-on, real-world element which made contact with others through the normal every day aspects of work and daily life rather than almost exclusively

151. *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1B, 23, 25

through public evangelistic meetings. That, and they were paying their own bills, a detail which gave rise to the term “self-supporting.”

An encounter with an angel in 1887¹⁵² inspired them both and probably contributed to official recognition. Brother Shireman was given a ministerial license in 1891; Amelia received missionary credentials in 1892; and Dan was ordained in 1893. In 1896, on the heels of conducting a more traditional evangelistic effort in the town of Hildebran, the Shiremans “built up an Adventist community center that included a school, teachers’ home, student housing, farm and farmhouse, blacksmith shop, and chapel.” This was the Hildebran School.¹⁵³

The Shiremans proved successful for simple reasons: They were willing to sacrifice, and they were brave in the face of threat. It’s been an essential part of every great gospel advance from the day the apostle James was beheaded until the present. Ellen White would acknowledge that basic quality like this:

Let those who have to do with the payment of the workers compare the results of Brother Shireman’s work with the results of the work of some ministers who have received full wages. The wages paid should be in accordance with the work done. Many receive wages to which they have no right unless they press into new fields and plant the standard of truth in new territory. There are those paid for full time who do not enter into aggressive warfare. They do not present the truth to those who have never heard it.

There are workers who are so conscientious that their interests must be guarded by their brethren, else they will cheat themselves. They will do without things that they really need. These faithful, unselfish workers are to be looked after by their fellow workers, else injustice will be done to them. Into all business transactions we are to bring the love and benevolence so plainly pointed out in the Word of God. The Lord requires us to deal with justice and mercy.¹⁵⁴

Where the Shiremans saints? Indubitably. Were the faultless? Nope. Just ten weeks later Ellen White would write to her son, Edson:

I see dangers that I am afraid you do not clearly discern. I am cautioned to consider carefully the case of Brother and Sister Shireman. He has done a work that many in like circumstances could have done and ought to have done, but did not do. Had they ventured out in this work, the Lord would greatly have blessed them, and as a result of their efforts, much fruit would have been borne to His glory. The Lord has worked through Brother Shireman. Brother Shireman has been rewarded in this life, and he will be rewarded in the future life, if he will hold the beginning of his confidence firm unto the end.

152. This event seems to have been confirmed by Ellen White. See her letter to Brother and Sister Shireman, April 17, 1902; Letter 61, 1902

153. Bert Haloviak, “The Orphan, the Angel, and the Long Walk,” *ARH*, May 31, 1990, 19

154. E.G. White, “The Payment of Workers,” February 11, 1902; Manuscript 16, 1902

I was writing a letter in commendation of Brother Shireman when something appeared before me in print that led me to refrain from writing further. I was strongly impressed that it would not be best to praise Brother Shireman; that at the present time praise would be inappropriate and unwise; for it would prove a temptation to him.

Those who do faithful service for the Master have His commendation. But circumstances will arise in their experience that will lead them to take the words of the Lord, spoken to encourage them in a time of emergency, when they were in great difficulty, and use them in a way that will tarnish their future experience. When they should walk softly before the Lord, and tremble at His word, they will repeat His words of encouragement as a vindication of their course of action. Their misconception of the Lord's approval places them in great danger. He spoke these words to them to show them that He was not unmindful of their works and their labor of love, not to lead them to become self-sufficient.

I was about to write some words of encouragement to one who had helped in the work in the Southern field at a time when it was going very hard. A hand was placed upon the paper, forbidding me to write, and a voice said, "These words of commendation will do harm to the one you are addressing. God is the Master-worker. Glorify Him, not man."

My son, let us be very careful not to praise or flatter any human being. Do not place before the Lord's servants the temptation of human praise. It is God who enables men and women to accomplish good. He is behind every worker. Without His power, man is helpless.

Light has been given me that sufficient has been said and done to place Brother Shireman in a proper light before his brethren. Brother and Sister Shireman's danger is in thinking they can carry forward to a successful completion the work they have begun. But should they be allowed to follow their plans, the work would not develop as it should, and they would be a hindrance instead of a help.¹⁵⁵

The Shiremans were pioneers. They were good at the tough jobs, flexible enough to adjust and adapt as necessary to keep a fledgling operation alive. But those qualities, so essential in the establishment of a project, are less useful and sometimes flat out harmful to what is ideally a smooth running enterprise.

Face it, that's going to be a tough blow. You've sacrificed and scrimped and busted your gut to get something going, and then someone comes along and says you're not really qualified to run the operation any more.

How would you react?

That's about the same way the Shiremans reacted... at first. For a time they were suspicious and resentful of what looked to them like a power grab. Was that unreasonable of them? Not really. Here's why. About a year before, the newly appointed conference president had tried to take over their work. That's

155. E.G. White, Letter to J.E. White, April 24, 1902; Letter 64, 1902

pretty close to the definition of a power grab, though Ellen White used the idea of “usurp” to get the idea across:

It is not your work to go into another man’s field of labor and take up a work which by much labor and sacrifice he has established. There are plenty of fields as barren and as needy as was this one when Brother Shireman first entered it. Why should you not go to these fields and there give evidence of your capability, tact, and ingenuity? Do not, I beg of you, act the part of a usurper or an accuser of the brethren, for the Lord will not justify any such course of action. This is not the work you are appointed by the Conference to do....

The Conference should understand that it has no right to send a man to take the work out of the hands of one who has done the hard labor, gaining his way little by little, the Lord working with him, and giving him hire, in souls, for his labor....

In regard to the property which Brother Shireman has built up, let no selfish greed force him to make it over to the Conference. There may be other places where he should work, and he should have something with which to operate. If he were called away suddenly, he could make this property over to someone he could trust. He should be allowed to control his own property, the results of his hard labor. He should never be allowed to feel himself destitute.

Brother Shireman will always need helpers, but not men who will seek to set him aside and supersede him.¹⁵⁶

The trickiest part of the situation, though, was that the conference president wasn’t all wrong. The time was coming when the Shiremans were going to be in over their heads. Pioneering is one thing; running a well established school is another. Others recognized it, as well as the president. But as is often the case, it’s make or break in the way you approach an issue. Others, with more tact, had the hard talks. Ellen White offered her advice. For a while, the Shiremans balked at the idea.

But they read Ellen White’s letters¹⁵⁷... probably more than once or twice... and didn’t throw them away. In early 1905 the arrangements were finalized and the Hildebran School was passed off to the management of the North Carolina Conference. The Shiremans moved to Toluca in response to a request from that community that they establish a school there. Sadly, Sister Shireman passed away shortly after their arrival, but 71-year-old Daniel set about building an orphanage, a school, and a home for a teacher.

A new challenge came to him in 1908 when the conference president apparently apologized to him. The details are lacking so we have to read between the lines just a bit. Here’s what Ellen White wrote to Shireman:

In the night season I was conversing with you and speaking words of encouragement. The Lord our God is merciful. When His servants make mistakes, He sends them

156. E.G. White, Letter to J.O. Johnston, July 27, 1901; Letter 108, 1901

157. See her letters of April 17 and 22, and May 9, 1902. Letter 61, 1902; Letter 63, 1902; Letter 88, 1902

reproof. When the messages of reproof are received and accepted by those who have made mistakes, and changes are made in the life, the brethren should recognize the reformation, and they should encourage and seek to place on vantage ground those struggling to do right. I rejoice this is the way you feel towards Brother Johnson.

The Lord is now to be honored by the men who carry His work. Let there be a just recognition of the change in Brother Johnson. To neglect to do this, and to refuse to encourage and to build up the one who has been seeking to correct his course of action is to refuse to carry out principles that Christ has clearly laid down in His Word.

I am instructed to say to you that mistakes were made on both sides of this question. Brother and Sister Shireman did not view everything in a correct light. While brother Johnson did not take a right course, it is also true that others connected with him did not discern that their own spirit and words were also wrong.

Brother Johnson should now have encouragement. When a man of his temperament sees and acknowledges his wrong, and changes his course of action, there should be a disposition on the part of his brethren and sisters not only to forgive, but to do everything possible to restore confidence and to strengthen his hands. The impression should never be left on a human mind that the man who has done wrong, though he sees and corrects his wrong, should still be prevented from standing on vantage ground with his brethren. When such a course is pursued toward any erring soul, the Saviour is misrepresented. Those who recognize the reformation should show forgiveness and treat the brother who has erred with confidence and special kindness.

This instruction has been given me during the night, and now, at one o'clock in the morning, I am writing to you the message I have received. We need to encourage the erring to confess their wrongs; we should forgive them freely, recognizing the instruction God has given in His Word.¹⁵⁸

Had any of these people been flawless? No. But so what? If I've been forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents, shouldn't I be willing to forgive someone who owes me a hundred denarii?¹⁵⁹ The goal is not proving myself right nor proving the other guy wrong! The goal is getting both of us to heaven!

In 1911 Dan Shireman wrote to Ellen White:

The work we have been doing since coming south has created a kind feeling toward us; we have had some three or four hundred children in the different schools and homes we have conducted during these years, and quite a number were orphan and destitute children. We expect to see fruit in the City of God. We have toiled hard, and denied ourselves of many comforts we might have had; but how could we when we saw so much ignorance and poverty all around us?¹⁶⁰

The Shiremans weren't perfect, but I'll call them saints.

158. E.G. White, Letter to Brother Shireman, September 12, 1908; Letter 254, 1908

159. Matthew 18:24–35

160. Dan T. Shireman, Letter to Ellen White, December 24, 1911. White Estate Archives Document 030550

26. *The Southern Work*

Alongside the work of the Shiremans (if not actually built upon the foundation they laid) was the growth of what has come to be known as The Southern Work. In mid-1895, just shortly before the Shiremans started their efforts in Hildebran, Edson and Emma White organized the Southern Missionary Society. Here is Arthur White's description:

The Southern Missionary Society [was] an organization... that was recognized by the General Conference as the agency largely responsible for the work of the church among the blacks. This was almost entirely a self-supporting work, carried on with approval of church leaders and with minimal financial assistance.¹⁶¹

It was the shifting balance between "the approval of church leaders" and the "almost entirely... self-supporting" part that led to most of the tensions that would plague the SMS over the course of its roughly 14 years of operation. Slightly less than eight years into that time, Former General Conference president George Butler defended its work at the General Conference session of 1903:

It was some eight years ago that Brother Edson White felt like giving himself more directly to the work of God; and in view of what his mother has said, he felt a burden to work for the colored people. He took that burden upon his heart, had a little steamer built called the "Morning Star." With this he went down into the hardest spots they had in the whole Southern field—down in Vicksburg, Natchez, Yazoo. Around in that country I suppose there is as little favor shown to the colored people as anywhere in the South. He labored thus for about five years.

He had quite a little company of workers associated with him, Brethren W.O. Palmer, Fred Rogers, and others, and they labored there at the risk of their lives. The white men around said their meetings must stop, and they took one of the workers and put him on the cars and told him to leave; and I think there were two or three colored people killed. Sometimes, Brother Rogers tells me, men going by would fire a rifle ball right through his house; and when he went up to Yazoo City, he had to go in the night, and come back in the night.

Sometimes when the vessel was anchored, and while they were having meetings on it, there would be plans concocted to destroy and burn it—I do not know what they would have done to the persons on it—but God in His infinite mercy in some way would give them the information, and they would sail away, and when the men got there, they did not find the vessel. Many things of this kind might be mentioned, but this is sufficient to show that the brethren labored there at the risk of their lives...

Night schools and other schools were established so that these people might receive instruction. I think there was one old lady seventy or eighty years old that wanted to learn to read her Bible for herself; she went to one of these schools, and

161. A.L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years*, Volume 5, 39

got so that she could read her Bible. More than one hundred were brought into the truth in this way. There is quite a large company there yet. Four or five schools had to be kept up, and they have had the greatest struggle to get the money to keep these schools going.

There has been some misunderstanding, some lack of information, and I think some wrong feeling in regard to the work of the Southern Missionary Society. But I believe that the Southern Missionary Society has done a great deal of good. I will say it fearlessly before this whole Conference that there never has been made an effort in this cause for the colored people that accomplished as much as that work has done for them.

Now, my brethren, I do not propose to go back to [go back *on?*] that kind of work. I would to God there was a good deal more of it—more men who would risk their lives, and go there. Why, they have got just as good missionary fields there as you have in the central part of Africa. Our brethren are working to get laborers over into Africa, and all right, but, for the Lord's sake, help us to reach that class of people right here, under far more favoring circumstances.

The Southern [Missionary] Society has kept up a legal existence. It is really a legal society, and it has had its officers elected. Those officers have consulted together, and I have the honor to be one of the members of that official committee of the Southern Missionary Society. Brother Horton, of Louisiana, is another. I do not believe he is ashamed of it; I am not.¹⁶²

During its short lifetime the organization “developed from scratch” five talented black ministers, established schools with 150 students in Vicksburg and 200 in Lintonia, and planted churches in Vicksburg, Yazoo City, Calmar, Columbus, Jackson, Nashville, Memphis, Edgefield Junction, Louisville, and Bowling Green. Among those who accepted the Bible truths which could easily have cost them their lives was Etta Little-John, from Vicksburg, one of the first sixteen students at Oakwood. She was later to become the mother of Charles E. Bradford, who was to become a much beloved president of the North American Division.

It's a shame to skip over all the “little stories” from this arena, though time and space demand it. But put it on your list of things to do sometime in eternity to go back and visit them, and then decide how “little” they were to those who had the privilege of telling you what God and His workers did to get *them* there.

The last big names in this setting that we need to consider are the Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute (aka, Madison College, established in 1904) and the Naples School (established in 1910 and now known as Fletcher Academy), both of which were built on the principles pioneered by the Shiremans and the workers of the SMS.

162. G.I. Butler, *General Conference Bulletin*, April 9, 1903

27. *The Life and Trials of Elder Watson*

There's no doubt in my mind that Elder George Watson would have been overjoyed to have everybody talking about "the Marten letter," or "the Hoover letter." Having his name inseparably affixed to *that* letter was never an easy cross to bear. We've talked about it, and quoted it, but from our perspective more than a century and a quarter later, we generally have no idea how much agitation came from its 536 words. Still in the midst of that turmoil there is a promise. A pretty well hidden promise, I think it's fair to say, but a promise nonetheless. It's implicit, not explicit, but every piece of divine instruction—or reproof—carries with it the promise of blessing if we take the instruction to heart. Properly, I might add. Take it to heart *properly*.

In the case of this letter, that's been more challenging than most. Before we get into those details, though, a little background will help us have a more sympathetic mental picture of Elder Watson. Here's a letter he wrote to Willie in 1902, well before the Grand Junction incident took place:

I write you at this time in regard to a matter that has become a serious thing in this conference, and that is concerning the overdrawn appeals for money coming from the Southern Union Conference. We, as a conference, have sent them much money, and I wrote them some time ago asking that we be let alone for a time, at least, until we could pay some of our debt. You no doubt know that this conference has struggled under a heavy debt for years, and we owe the money to a widow who needs it....

Now the facts are that the Southern Union Conference are not only urging our people to send them donations, but in a private way they are asking our people to send them their tithe, and some are doing it, thinking it all right. Now, if this kind of work can be stopped in a quiet way, well and good; but if not, we will have to use other measures.¹⁶³

In 1913, Elder Watson put some figures on this issue:

I remember several years ago, when I was called to the presidency of the Colorado Conference. I hated to face what I had to face—\$7,600 in debt, and an overdraft on the tithe of twelve hundred dollars, with twenty-six workers. I begged to be relieved, but was not relieved.¹⁶⁴

When you're in debt, it's hard to be happy about money disappearing. That's understandable. But who's to decide if the need is greater in Colorado or in Tennessee? So a couple years later, when the ladies in Grand Junction gave their tithe and offerings to the Southern Missionary Society, that was just a bit too much for

163. G.F. Watson, Letter to W.C. White, January 13, 1902; White Estate Archives Document 018110

164. G.F. Watson, 1913 *General Conference Bulletin*, 232. That \$7,600 debt would be something in the neighborhood of \$300,000 today. Not huge by the creative financing standards so popular now, though I'm not smart enough to say whether that's a good thing or not.

Elder Watson. His next letter went straight to the top, as he apparently felt the situation demanded the attention of the General Conference president.

"Your favor of late date came,¹⁶⁵ and I am well pleased with the position you take against the inroads that some have made on our conference funds.... The treasurer of the Grand Junction church reported to our state Treasurer \$150 tithe sent away, and when I came to the church, I found where it had gone to. We have some well-to-do people in the Grand Junction church, and two of these are widows. W.O. Palmer [of the SMS] got \$75 of one, and \$35 of the other, and made arrangements to borrow a large sum of one, but he does not get this now.

"Elder J.E. White wrote to this church upholding W.O. Palmer. I wrote to Elder J.E. White that if he wished the cooperation of the Colorado Conference in his work, he had better see that the tithe carried off by W.O. Palmer got back into the Colorado Conference treasury. W.O. Palmer asked this church to send all their tithe to the Southern Missionary Society. I have just as much use for W.O. Palmer as I do for J.E. White. This dishonest work has been going on by this Society for years, and I am tired of it."¹⁶⁶

Of course, this far removed from the event, it's impossible to gauge the exact accuracy of Elder Watson's understanding. The comment about Palmer asking for "all their tithe" seems like it might be something of an exaggeration, but who's to say? That's where things sat before Ellen White's letter to Elder Watson. The fact that the situation involved her son was no doubt unpleasant for her. But it involved more than her son; it involved important principles. So she wrote a letter to Elder Watson....

But what was written in that letter was so foreign to Elder Watson that he hardly knew what to do with it.

If W.C. White's memory is correct (Elder Watson said it wasn't), the two men had a conversation at the 1905 General Conference session less than four months after the letter was written. Willie remembered Watson asking if the letter was a forgery;¹⁶⁷ Watson didn't remember *any* conversation, but writing about it eight years later, he certainly argued for the forgery idea.¹⁶⁸

For some years, Elder Watson held his peace. But during those years a small army of zealous saints was going to work in the American South, and for this, they needed money. To them, the Watson Letter made sense. It acknowledged the heavy lifting that the self-supporting missionaries were doing, and acknowledged the freedom of donors to exercise their individual stewardship as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Some of these saints weren't bashful about using the Watson letter in their fund raising efforts. That was good... except when it wasn't. And that actually

165. Today, that would be "I received your recent letter."

166. G.F. Watson, Letter to A.G. Daniells, December 14, 1904. White Estate Archives Document 018838

167. W.C. White, Letter to G.F. Watson, December 28, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 035779

168. G.F. Watson, Letter to W.C. White, December 15, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 035778

turned out to be significant. Why wasn't it good? Because half of the church saw the letter as a triangle, and half saw it as a square.

Elder Watson remained in his position as the president of the Colorado Conference until 1908. Then he spent two years as president in South Dakota before heading down to the Southwestern Union Conference to hold the office of president there. It was during his tenure at the union level that the infamous letter really hit the fan.

What was meant as a cautionary message for Elder Watson, proved to be far too incendiary to be kept private. The value of the letter as a fund raiser was not lost on the folks running schools like the Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute (aka, Madison College), the Naples School which we've seen before, and similar organizations scattered about the southern United States.

A small but important point just flashed across the radar screen, and we need to take a look at it or we'll be missing a key element in the situation. That detail was the mention of "the southern United States." Why just the South?

Circumstances. The unique combination of conditions left over from the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era had created a situation quite different from the rest of the country, and the rest of the world, too, for that matter. Poverty, illiteracy, racial tension all combined to make schools and farming the front lines of evangelism. Church membership was small and predominantly poor. Budgets were thin. So the first prerequisite for effective service was a willingness to work without much remuneration and sometimes even less appreciation. That's what the Shiremans and their tribe were doing.¹⁶⁹

It's what the circumstances demanded. But make a mental note that the South was unique. Other regions were different.

Elder Watson and the other officials of the church knew of the sacrifices being made by these "independents." They were not completely unsympathetic. But they were responsible for the operation of "*the church*." The apple of God's eye. The three angels messages. The one thing above all else that mattered on this earth. And they had bills to pay. Hold that thought.

169. At the Naples School in 1910, for instance, Willie White found that students were required to work six hours each day, and were credited ten cents an hour. This would very nearly cover their tuition, room, and board—a very good deal for a poor student who would never be able to afford a more traditional education. The staff, on the other hand, were working ten to eleven hours each day and allowing themselves five cents an hour. The goal was to earn enough from the school farm to make all this workable.

28. *Supply Lines*

Heard anything about supply lines lately? Like, what happens if the truckers can't afford diesel anymore? That's a pretty good question, really. Or what happens to the pharmaceutical industry if supplies from China stop flowing?¹⁷⁰

It turns out that it's not only international commerce that needs to consider supply lines; God does, too.

All of which reminds me of juncos. And chickadees, and even nuthatches. These are all little birds, all about the same size, all with similar habits, all of which live in the same sort of habitat, all of which eat the same sort of food. Sounds like the makings of a "survival of the fittest" disaster, doesn't it?

Actually, they usually get along quite well. None of them have gone extinct. Why? Because the Bible tells the truth: "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."¹⁷¹ Jesus mentioned this idea once when He said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."¹⁷²

If we keep this issue of God's promise to provide our needs in mind, the next bit of the chapter takes on a more pointed focus:

Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

We tend to think of this "confessing" and "denying" as our relation to a set of doctrinal truths, and I'm sure that is a part of the package. But the issue goes deeper. Lucifer got into his whole mess when he lost faith that God would provide for his needs. That's why he decided to "exalt" himself. In contrast, Jesus didn't do that. He could have made bread out of stones, but He didn't. Why not? Because He depended on His father. He could have called twelve legions of angels, but He didn't. Why not? Because He depended on His father.

This kind of behavior agitates people. It's odd, but it does, and so Jesus went straight from sparrows, to confession, to these verses:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household.¹⁷³

170. Two minor items of interest here: 1) Something like 90% of prescription drugs include ingredients sourced from China, and 2) heroin is not the only drug that has withdrawal issues.

171. Psalms 145:16

172. Matthew 10:29

173. Matthew 10:29–36

SIDEBAR: THE SOUTHERN CIRCUMSTANCES

The unique circumstances presented by the southern United States called for a unique approach. That's what circumstances do. Ellen White once advised, "You must master circumstances, and not allow circumstances to master you."¹⁷⁴ The best way to be mastered by any enemy is to ignore his existence! That's what a blind adherence to "policy" does. And the odd thing is that it can work both ways!

Let's pretend there's a policy that says we do "A." Very good. That seems organized and smart. But then circumstances come up that make "A" unworkable, or at least not desirable. What to do?

The options are pretty simple: Do "A" anyway, or come up with a "B" that will work better than "A." A slavish "policy man" will choose "A" precisely because it's the approved policy. A more free-wheeling creative type will come up with "B." That much may have been obvious, but it turns out that there is a subset of the population who are "free-wheeling" when it comes to other people's policies, but just as capable of getting stuck in a rut with their own ideas. W.C. White tried to head this off at the pass:

Regarding the matter of ownership, I do not see any reason why the Madison system of ownership should be carried into California, Wisconsin, Texas, or any other State, where it is not a necessity. It did seem to be a necessity in Tennessee, in view of the financial conditions of the southern Union Conference when this school was established. The brethren establishing the school regarded it as a necessity. The southern Union Conference Committee accepted it as a necessity, and I understand what Mother has written as acknowledging it as a necessity.¹⁷⁵

Willie's reference to his mother's acknowledgment was probably based on this comment to the president and treasurer of the General Conference:

When my advice was asked in reference to the Madison school, I said, Remain as you are. There is danger in binding every working agency under the dictation of the conference. The Lord did not design that this should be. The circumstances were such that the burden-bearers in the Madison school could not bind up their work with the conference. I knew their situation; and when many of the leading men in our conferences ignored them because they did not place their school under conference dictation, I was shown that they would not be helped by making themselves amenable to the conference. They had better remain as led by God, amenable to Him, to work out His plans. But this matter need not be blazed abroad.¹⁷⁶

174. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, 46

175. W.C. White, Letter to A.G. Daniells, December 31, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 032260

176. E.G. White, Letter to A.G. Daniells and I.H. Evans, September 23, 1907; Letter 314, 1907

If we were to develop a “theology of provision,” or a “doctrine of supply,” it would have to end up something like this:

He sends the springs into the valleys, they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their home; They sing among the branches. He waters the hills from Hisupper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart....

These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.¹⁷⁷

The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.¹⁷⁸

Of course we all know we should be thankful for what God provides, but “confessing” the sufficiency of His provision is a big deal.

Why? Because it's at the center of the whole great controversy. Lucifer claimed the right to decide for himself what he needed. And most notably, he didn't need unselfishness!

Unselfishness, the principle of God's kingdom, is the principle that Satan hates; its very existence he denies. From the beginning of the great controversy he has endeavored to prove God's principles of action to be selfish, and he deals in the same way with all who serve God. To disprove Satan's claim is the work of Christ and of all who bear His name.¹⁷⁹

Catch that last sentence. That's your job. That's “confessing” God's provision of your need.

A caution right here is in order. None of this is to say that everyone needs to quit their jobs and sit around expecting God to drop cash in the front yard. You've probably got some strength and some talents, so don't be selfish. Put them to work, earn some money, help someone else. If God wants you to quit your job, He'll call you just as surely as Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew... and all the rest. But the point to remember is, He'll call you to unselfishness and nothing else.

The church of Christ was organized for missionary purposes. Christian missionary work furnishes the church with a sure foundation, a foundation having this seal, “The Lord knoweth them that are His.” By it the members are inspired with zeal to deny self, to put forth self-sacrificing efforts to send the truth to the re-

177. Psalm 104:10–15, 27–28

178. Psalm 145:15–16

179. *Education*, 154

gions beyond. It has a salutary influence upon unbelievers; for as the workers labor under divine supervision, worldlings are led to see the greatness of the resources that God has provided for those who serve Him. We are laid under a most solemn obligation to furnish, in Christian missions, an illustration of the principles of the kingdom of God. The church is to work actively, as an organized body, to spread abroad the influence of the cross of Christ.¹⁸⁰

The experience of apostolic days will come to us if men will be worked by the Holy Spirit. The Lord will withdraw His blessing where selfish interests are indulged; but He will put His people in possession of good throughout the world, if they will unselfishly use their ability for the uplifting of humanity. His work is to be a sign of His benevolence, a sign that will win the confidence of the world and bring in resources for the advancement of the gospel.¹⁸¹

He who has given his life to God in ministry to His children is linked with Him who has all the resources of the universe at His command.¹⁸²

Satan's plan was different, of course.

His purpose was to establish a kingdom which would be governed by his own laws, and carried on with his own resources, independent of God.¹⁸³

Satan erected his standard of revolt against God in heaven. He aspired to be like God, and determined to assert a power of independence of God. His after-history has revealed a persevering determination to establish his empire, governed by laws, and replenished with resources, independent of God.¹⁸⁴

Don't worry if you're confused by the idea of "resources independent of God." I can't explain it, either, but somehow Satan thinks it's a real thing, and God seems to be taking the issue rather seriously, so I'm pretty sure we should follow His lead on that. A couple more gems:

God will work for us and by us and through us, if we will give ourselves to Him without reserve, walking in all humility of mind, working with faith, and having confidence in His power to supply all our needs.¹⁸⁵

"For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid." What is their fear? It is that, if they obey the commandments of God, they will be despised and ridiculed; if they come out from the world, they will be left to suffer want. Such a fear reveals a manifest unbelief in Him who provides all our blessings.¹⁸⁶

180. *Gospel Workers*, 464

181. *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1, 20

182. *Mount of Blessing*, 24

183. *Review and Herald*, August 18, 1896

184. *Review and Herald*, June 21, 1898

185. E.G. White, Letter to J.E. and Emma White, April 28, 1874; Letter 19a, 1874

186. E.G. White, "Our Talents," January 25, 1898; Manuscript 9, 1898

So depending on God to supply our needs is appropriate for those who are willing to work unselfishly. But unselfishness (aka, “love for others”) is such a foundational issue that it even governs God’s provision for our needs!

The Lord Jesus has given to every man his individual work. He who takes upon himself wonderful responsibilities that God has not placed upon him will feel that he must draw to his work all the resources that he can possibly gather to carry out his plans, irrespective of the great work that is to be done in our world by other men who are in God’s service.¹⁸⁷

And this was a lesson that both the independents and the conference brethren needed to learn: God can feed more than one kind of bird at the same time. Sometimes—at least in the human scenario—that may mean one group actually helping the other. Why? Because that’s what Christians do. In fact, there were examples of this kind of thing. Not many... but one big one stands out: at her own expense, Madison helped provide funding to develop the White Memorial Hospital which was thought necessary for the growth of the College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda.¹⁸⁸

29. *The Further Trials of Elder Watson*

We cut away from Elder Watson’s story to consider the major concern which complicated the work in the south for most of two decades. Funds were limited, and everyone was more familiar with the arguments in favor of their project than they were with any other. Some sort of friendly co-ordination would have been a good approach, but the simple reality was that no one managed to bridge the gap between the independents and the conference men.

Ellen White tried. That’s why she broke her life-long custom of declining to serve on corporate boards and accepted a position on Madison College’s legal governing body. That no doubt inspired some level of confidence in those looking on, but it wasn’t a magic bullet by any means.¹⁸⁹ The perceived loss of funds was just a really big hurdle in many conference administrators’ minds.

187. E.G. White, “A Message to Leading Physicians,” September 4, 1903; Manuscript 159, 1903

188. https://centerforadventistresearch.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/b16070136_a0001b.pdf

OK, so this one is complicated. I admire the spirit that prompted the support, while still believing that there were better options than linking up with the AMA and building a hospital in downtown Los Angeles. The whole “Chicago building” episode was an “object lesson for our people” “warning them not to invest largely of their means in property in Chicago, or any other city, unless the providence of God should positively open the way and plainly point out duty to build or buy as necessary in giving the note of warning. A similar caution was given in regard to building in Los Angeles.” E.G. White, “The Chicago Work,” March 20, 1906; Manuscript 33, 1906. You’ll find the whole story in Chapter 17 of *d’Sozo*.

189. You can read that story in Chapter 32 of *Hindsight*.

Ellen White tried in that arena, as well, writing to the General Conference president, A.G. Daniells:

Brother Daniells, I have a request to make of you: That from the gifts and offerings that are received from our people, you shall appropriate to the Madison school a liberal portion. This should have been done long ago. We should help Brethren Sutherland and Magan and their associates who have worked beyond their strength, under great disadvantages. Will you not seek to understand the situation and to see that justice and mercy are not forgotten in the distribution of funds? The brethren in Madison are laborers together with God, and He is not pleased that so little has been done in their behalf by some of their brethren.

I do not wish the brethren at Madison to know that I have written to you in their behalf. When you give them the portion of means that should go to them, let it go as a token of your own wisdom and discernment.¹⁹⁰

I've always liked that final touch. "Here, do this, but act like it was your own idea so you get the credit." Very classy.

Four months later, she wrote to the Southern Union Conference Committee:

The Lord does not set limits about His workers in some lines as men are wont to set. In their work, Brethren Magan and Sutherland have been hindered unnecessarily. Means have been withheld from them because in the organization and management of the Madison school, it was not placed under the control of the conference. But the reasons why this school was not owned and controlled by the conference have not been duly considered.

The lack of interest in this work, by some who should have valued it highly, is decidedly wrong. Our brethren must guard themselves against the repetition of such experiences.

The Lord does not require that the educational work at Madison shall be changed all about before it can receive the hearty support of our people. The work that has been done there is approved of God, and He forbids that this line of work shall be broken up. The Lord will continue to bless and sustain the workers so long as they follow His counsel.

Brethren Sutherland and Magan are as verily set to do the work of the Lord at Madison as other workers are appointed to do their part in the cause of present truth. The light given me is that we should help these brethren and their associates, who have worked beyond their strength, under great disadvantages. Let us seek to understand the situation, and see that justice and mercy are not forgotten in the distribution of funds.

The leaders in the work of the Madison school are laborers together with God. More must be done in their behalf by their brethren. The Lord's money is to sustain them in their labors. They have a right to share the means given to the cause. They should be given a proportionate share of the means that comes in for the furtherance of the cause.¹⁹¹

190. E.G. White, Letter to A.G. Daniells, January 25, 1907; Letter 46, 1907

191. *Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 11, 32

But still, it was a hard sell, even for the messenger of the Lord. Willie explained the challenge to Elder M.H. Brown, the Secretary/Treasurer of the North Carolina Conference, and one who supported the work of the independent schools:

I have been urging for two or three years that there should be councils in the Southeastern Union Conference in which the Union Conference Committee and the representatives of the schools should meet together and formulate a broad policy.... Elder Westworth seemed to be in favor of this plan, but he never got around to call the council.... Since his departure to China and the coming in of Brother Charles Thompson, there has seemed to be less of a feeling of co-operation and more of a feeling that it is safe to trust only that which we can control.

Now we see that your North Carolina Conference has stepped to the front and is doing in a most commendable way, the very work that we had hoped that the Union Conference would do. It is my conviction that you will meet with many obstacles, many discouragements, in following this policy; but if these obstacles and discouragements are met calmly and kindly in the fear of the Lord,... [God] will stand by you....

The recent action of the North Carolina Conference, by which they put themselves on record not as opposers and hinderers of the self supporting schools, but as sympathetic helpers, as co-laborers, makes us feel that there is advance all along the line.

Willie's hope was that getting all the people involved together in the same room would help them realize that they were actually all on the same team. It sounds so rational, so simple. But the sticking point was always money. Willie's letter continues:

In your letter you ask... "Why is it that so many of our leading brethren are so opposed or look with suspicion upon Independent or self-supporting enterprises of an educational nature?"

The reasons are many, but they may be briefly stated under three heads.

1. When we go to the pasture to milk the cows so we can have food for the children, we find the cows are already milked....
2. A more serious cause for complaint and opposition to the so-called independent or self-supporting schools, is that the students are filled with enthusiasm regarding independent work and are alienated from the denominational work....
3. Backsliders and contentious persons who give to these independent enterprises are comforted and cheered and strengthened in their opposition to the church and the home conference....

For the sake of space, I've left out the lengthy explanations for each of those three points. But let's pick up again just after his discussion of number three.

There may be many other minor causes for opposition, but these, I think, are the principal ones. I do not regard them as imaginary or trivial difficulties. They are real, genuine difficulties that need to be studied faithfully and candidly by the regular conference workers and by those who are doing auxiliary work under the head of independent or self-supporting schools.

In answer to the question, What shall we do about it? a hasty answer from the representatives of the auxiliary or self-supporting schools would be, Let our brethren who are criticizing and opposing our work take a broader view, let them study the needs of the field, let them give heed to the Testimonies which are calling upon our people everywhere to take a part in this work, let them stop their misrepresentation and their opposition to our work, and then there will be less occasion for us to say the things that are oftentimes misunderstood by our students and reported in such a way as to cause trouble.

On the other hand, a hasty answer from the Union Conference Presidents would be, Whatever needs to be done can be done by our Conferences more wisely than by independent workers. Let this independent work be stopped, and we can raise more funds and do more work than is being done at the present time.

Neither of these answers meets the necessity of the case; neither of these answers will bring peace or harmony because they are made in the light of one side only of the controversy.¹⁹²

I like Elder White's idea. It might have worked, but, of course, it's impossible to say since it just never really happened.

And then, in 1913, everything sort of unraveled. Elder Watson's Southwestern Union Conference had hired an Elder Littell to work in the West Texas Conference, but then it turned out Littell actually favored Madison and all the other smaller schools. That didn't sit well. Watson wrote to Littell:

I am not in sympathy at all with the idea of independent sanitariums or schools for the education of our young people; and I am sorry that you have taken upon yourself to advise any of our young people to attend an institution that is not in the organized work.

Now, I want you to be frank with me and tell me if it is your plan to encourage young people to connect with the Madison institution. Also, is it your purpose to advise our people to send money for the support of this institution? If this is true, I want to tell you plainly that we cannot use you as a minister in our Union....

We will be glad to have you connect with the work in West Texas if you are loyal to the organization of our denomination. But... if you are in sympathy with the Madison institution and will work for it, I want to tell you again that you will have to seek work in some other field, for we are not in harmony with these independent institutions.¹⁹³

Delicacy and tact may not have been Elder Watson's strongest points, but he was clear, and that's not a bad thing in itself. While his letter may sound cold and hard, you have to remember that Watson was fighting a battle with cold, hard debt on the Union level, and the fund raising of these independent operations had been a pain in his neck for more than a decade by this time. I assume he felt like it was the only position he could take.

192. W.C. White, Letter to M.H. Brown, March 6, 1911; White Estate Archives Document 027191

193. G.F. Watson, Letter to Elder Leslie Littell, February 24, 1913; White Estate Archives Document 033592

Several months later, Elder Watson—not a happy camper at this point—sent out a number of warning letters to other conference workers. In time, one of these was given to W.C. White to read. The exchange of correspondence which followed is informative. We'll start with the warning from Elder Watson:

I am writing you at this time, hoping to give you a little warning against the positions that are held by Elder Littell in regard to the independent schools and the testimonies, or so called testimonies, that he is sending out and reading wherever he goes.

I just returned from Washington, D.C., where all the leading brethren from the United States and Canada and one from Europe have been in council, and the question of the independent schools was considered and it was decided by the General council that the Madison school was out of harmony with the denomination and the organized work, and unless they get in harmony with the organized work will have to advise that our people do not send their children to this school.

I was called upon to read the letter to the General Conference Counsel that I read at the West Texas Conference,¹⁹⁴ and all the General Conference men took their stand firmly that it was not a testimony from the Lord, and W.C. White made the statement before us all that "It could not be considered as a testimony." I wish I could visit your church and all the churches in the Conference, and I hope to be able to do so some time before our Union Conference which will convene the first of April.

I just write you this, hoping that you will not be misled by the letters and testimonies that Elder Littell is sending out. I am very sorry for all this, but it is the devil's work to divide the people who are giving him the most trouble in the work.¹⁹⁵

As you might have guessed, this raised a number of concerns in Elder White's mind. Soon, he wrote to Elder Watson:

There are some things in this letter which greatly surprise me, and especially the following statements:

(a) That it was decided by the General Council that the Madison school was out of harmony with the denomination and the organized work.

(b) That all the General Conference men took their stand firmly that it (the letter you read at the West Texas Conference) was not a testimony from the Lord.

(c) That Elder W.C. White made the statement before us all, "It could not be considered as a testimony."

(d) Your hope that the brethren will not be misled by the letters, and testimonies that Elder Littell is sending out.¹⁹⁶

Elder Watson's response is a testimony to how strongly he believed in his understanding of the church. I have no doubt he loved the church and would do anything he could to protect and prosper it, but his concept of the church, sin-

194. This is the 1905 "Watson Letter," of course.

195. G.F. Watson, Letter to Dear Brother, November 7, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 033599

196. W.C. White, Letter to G.F. Watson, December 7, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 035777

cerely held, had no place for anything but the “organized work.” The famous letter clearly controverted that point, so the letter was a problem.

I never meant to convey the idea that any action was taken by the General Conference Committee respecting what is known as the “Watson letter.” Yet, it was plain to see that the general impression of that company of men was that the Watson Letter was not inspired....

You also stated when questioned about Volume Nine, that Volume Nine was written to counteract the Watson Letter. Now, Elder, God never writes anything and then has to write something else to counteract what He has formerly written. I do not see how Volume Nine and the Watson Letter can both have come from the same source. I do believe that your Mother is a prophet of God, and I hope my faith will never be shaken in that, but I never have met anyone who can harmonize what she has written in her bound books and what she wrote to me.¹⁹⁷

The passage referred to in *Testimonies*, vol. 9, comes under the heading, “The Use of the Tithe,” and begins on page 247. In a nutshell, it says the tithe is “sacred, reserved by God for Himself.” It warns against not returning tithe, and clearly states that the tithe is to be “used to sustain the gospel laborers in their work,” it is “still to be used for the support of the ministry.” Other lines of work, good though they may be, are not to draw on the tithe. What it doesn’t do is establish a sole, monopolistic channel as the only means for getting tithe to appropriate workers. It appears that Elder Watson, and at least some others, read that into the passage. If that were so, there would be an unavoidable conflict with the Watson letter.

In response, W.C. White sent a 21-page letter with a range of “evidentiary” materials which helped clarify the points Elder Watson had raised. Perhaps the most important of these was this:

At the Council you spoke vary feelingly over the fact that you could not see how that Volume Nine and the Watson letter could both have come from the same source. If there had been more time, I would have presented some thoughts and experience regarding our believing only that which we can understand and harmonize with other things which we know. In my connection with the truth and work of God, I am obliged to accept many things as truth that I cannot fully understand, and that appear to me to be out of harmony with other things which I believe and hold to be true.

In such matters, human reason says, If these things do not harmonize, throw one away, for truth is harmonious. That is the way Luther felt about the book of James, because he could not harmonize its teachings with his understanding of the teachings of Paul on justification by faith. But faith in God helps us to say, I will wait and study and pray, and possibly in His good time the Lord will enable me to understand these matters more clearly.

197. G.F. Watson, Letter to W.C. White, December 15, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 035778

In response to our faith we are given new and varied experiences, and some day, looking at the matter from a new view point, we see a harmony in that which before appeared to be contradictory.¹⁹⁸

To put that another way, truncated icosahedra, cubes, tetrahedra, squares, and even triangles can—upon closer examination, with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit—actually be recognized as clouds. Seems crazy, right?

30. *By Way of Comparison*

The noted industrialist, Henry Ford, once said, “History is bunk.” To a degree, I think he was right. History for the sake of history doesn’t interest me. History for the sake of learning something about the present and future has a lot more appeal. We’ve covered a fair amount of history; now it’s time to see if we can turn any of it to practical benefit.

Ellen White was aware that some church members had “lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe.” So she advised the respected and well-known “J.J.” Gravelle to go to her conference leaders and “encourage them to bear their responsibilities faithfully in the fear of God.”¹⁹⁹ In other cases where the concerned parties had neither the reputation nor the experience that would well qualify them to exert a correcting influence, Ellen White simply accommodated their longing for a channel they could trust. She didn’t advertise, she didn’t solicit, she just quietly arranged for the Lord’s tithe to be used faithfully in the Lord’s work.

Was their loss of confidence justified? Was it appropriate? Ellen White never says. Why would she? How could she? As Sarah McEnterfer put it, she believed that “this matter of tithe-paying is a personal matter between the individual and his God.” She had “instructed the people according to the Bible, concerning tithing,” and had “encouraged them to be faithful in this matter.” That done, it seems she felt “little further responsibility.”²⁰⁰

This stands in stark contrast to the following:

Some have been dissatisfied and have said: “I will not longer pay my tithe; for I have no confidence in the way things are managed at the heart of the work.” But will you rob God because you think the management of the work is not right? Make your

198. W.C. White, Letter to G.F. Watson, December 28, 1913. White Estate Archives Document 035779

199. Prior to finding out who J.J. actually was, I tended to put primary emphasis on the “put confidence in the ministers of the conference where you live and in the officers of the church where you worship” part of Ellen White’s counsel. I think this has been commonly done. That part of the counsel is still there in the letter, of course, but given the totality of the circumstances it certainly does not come across as “don’t question the judgment of your superiors.”

200. Sara McEnterfer, Letter to John C. McChesney, April 19, 1914; White Estate Archives Document 037643. This letter was quoted more fully on page 55.

complaint, plainly and openly, in the right spirit, to the proper ones. Send in your petitions for things to be adjusted and set in order; but do not withdraw from the work of God, and prove unfaithful, because others are not doing right.²⁰¹

“Proving unfaithful” is obviously wrong. So... did Ellen and Willie White fail to properly admonish Mrs. Gravelle? Brother Harper? All the others? Someone looking for a trumped up complaint against her might say so, but if we go back to the title of this publication, and use a little common sense in our analysis, the difference in the “circumstances” under discussion are obvious.

Lucy, Walter, all the others, were looking for a way to return tithe that didn’t leave them feeling like their stewardship was going to be abused in some way. Whoever Ellen White spoke of in this last statement, the dissatisfied “some,” had come to a vastly different conclusion. They decided to “not longer pay” their tithe. They decided to “withdraw from the work of God.” That’s obviously a bad thing, but to equate that with returning tithe through an alternative “channel” is to accuse all who ever did that, as well as all who thanked them for it! I’d be careful about jumping to that sort of conclusion.

Another comparison comes to mind now. While speaking of those who had “lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe,” we haven’t seen much comment as to the cause of this credibility crisis. The source of concern seems to have been simply the impression that the funds were either moving slowly or that they were being disbursed inequitably in a way which left some “neglected workers.”

If church members with any common sense at all were saying, “I have no confidence in the way things are managed at the heart of the work,” it leaves the door open for some other or greater aspect of concern... but we’ve never seen it specified.

By comparison, there are a number of arguably more weighty matters raising serious concerns within the church today. The flagrant violation of voted denominational policy in regard to the ordination of women is one of the more clearly defined issues. The sometimes blatant advocacy of non-Biblical sexual orientation is another. Buried in the past and almost completely a matter of water already long since passed under the bridge would be the issues of music, “worship style,” and the now well-established practice of copying an entertainment industry which seldom even makes pretensions of Christianity.²⁰²

201. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, 249

202. This despite the fact that we once had (but no longer) an “Official Statement” titled “A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music” which could not in any honesty be described as supporting much that is now commonplace. Those interested to see what was once considered “official” may still read the document at web.archive.org/web/20141019053341/http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/o/a-seventh-day-adventist-philosophy-of-music/

More recently, the positions taken by the church favoring the aggressively promoted Covid “vaccines” were seen by many as an unwarranted denial of the Holy Spirit’s role in leading individual members who honestly believe that “stewardship” takes in more than money. The church’s open advocacy for a controversial and untested medical intervention caused considerable harm to church members around the world who believed an informed decision on a new and experimental treatment was necessary in order to fulfill the command to “do all to the glory of God.”²⁰³ There are, apparently, multiple understandings of instruction such as this:

Obedience to the laws of health is to be made a matter of personal duty. We ourselves must suffer the results of violated law. We must individually answer to God for our habits and practices. Therefore the question with us is not, “What is the world’s practice?” but, “How shall I as an individual treat the habitation that God has given me?”²⁰⁴

The “pro-vaccine” stance which sought to define what individual members could or could not consider a matter of religious liberty—held so tenaciously that thousands of requests for its reconsideration failed to prompt even a cursory review of what had actually (and inaccurately) been published to the world²⁰⁵—has since been found to be only one of dozens of “Official Statements” said to represent the Seventh-day Adventist Church but without the vital legitimacy which comes from an open deliberative process. When it was seen that these were all parts of a systemic policy aligning the church with the positions and requirements of the United Nations, this was also a source of serious concern.

This alignment included a laudatory celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),²⁰⁶ which was praised for its inclusion of the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” promised in Article 18—despite the fact that Article 29 of the UDHR explicitly states that “These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.”²⁰⁷ This position became popular with all who placed governmental authority—or even the obviously lesser “public health authority”—above individual conscience, but there are some church members not so easily persuaded that the UN (or the health authority) is always going to be perfectly in sync with the Holy Spirit.

203. 1 Corinthians 10:31

204. *Ministry of Healing*, 310

205. In this regard, readers may wish to consider the analysis in my two-titles-in-one little book, *Officially Challenged and Directed by the Hand of the Lord*.

206. web.archive.org/web/20260106021639/https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/50th-anniversary-of-the-universal-declaration-of-human-rights/

207. www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

No amount of “nuance” has entirely erased the perception that this voluntary cooperation with the United Nations on issues far beyond the scope of the three angels messages, might well carry with it the danger of a “friendship with the world” such that we might be counted as “an enemy of God.”²⁰⁸

The comparison of concerns “back in the day,” with the concerns which have accumulated over recent decades, is undeniably lop-sided.

What would the Spirit say to our individual and collective consciences about this set of circumstances? What would common sense tell us? Given that even the swallowing up of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram failed to produce complete unity in the camp of Israel as to who and how the Lord was leading, it would take an uncommonly high level of optimism to think that there will not be varying opinions as to what to do.

It would be wonderful to offer a magic bullet solution, but it won’t happen. Even the second coming will only temporarily resolve issues. A thousand years on, all the incorrect positions will be brought back up once again.

Now, in our day, damage control is the least we can do. No one wants to have things explode on their watch. Rehoboam certainly did not. Neither did General Conference president, O.A. Olsen—and therein lies a cautionary tale of potential benefit.

If we, as did Daniel, would confess our collective errors humbly, without feeling the need to discredit all who might disagree with us, we might yet gain from the counsel given Ellen White’s “much respected brother,” Elder Olsen:

I am deeply burdened; but what shall I say? I am troubled for you, my much-respected brother. I am bowed down with anguish of spirit, for the situation is becoming more and more perplexing.

A net has been spread to involve the Conference, a net that the people know not of, and that very few suspect the existence of. The condition of things is binding your hands and hindering the work. The crisis will soon be reached. The state of things is not fully revealed to me, but this much I know: to a great degree, the management of finances has been conducted on wrong principles. While all is supposed to be prosperous, there is peril.

You have connected with you men who have no living connection with God. You fear to exercise your judgment, lest there should be an explosion. This is why I feel so sad.²⁰⁹

Finally, we come to perhaps the most fundamental comparison of all. You see, the common thread through all this story around the stewardship of tithe is echoed in dozens of other stories and issues. It is, in fact, embedded deep within the great controversy itself. We can see this in the

208. James 4:4

209. E.G. White, Letter to O.A. Olsen, May 1, 1895; Letter 57, 1895

SIDEBAR: O.A. OLSEN

The letter to Elder Olsen carries a stiff rebuke! Other letters repeatedly struck the same tone. And yet she calls him “much respected.” It was true, she did respect him. It’s just that the office of General Conference president was too big a job for him, and he was doing a poor job of carrying the responsibilities of his position. That didn’t make him unrespectable! It meant that changes were needed. But Ellen White didn’t throw him away. She helped him recover himself, and kept him productively employed in the Lord’s work.

In 1897, following his term as General Conference president, Elder Olsen worked a year in South Africa, and two years heading up the work in Europe. In 1901 he was asked to lead the work in Great Britain. In 1905 he went to Australia, where he served as president of the union for four years. In 1909 he was made secretary of the North American Foreign Department of the General Conference, and in 1913 was elected vice president of the North American Division, posts he filled until his death in 1915.

The lesson is simple: people make mistakes, sometimes very serious mistakes. But those who will admit, and learn from their mistakes, can turn their experience of failure into a positive asset for the future. And those who see their mistakes, should help them do so. Why is that so hard?

Those who make serious mistakes and fail to acknowledge them, who seek to avoid the responsibility that comes with authority, are another story. What to do with them? *Labor for their conversion on that point.* Ellen White’s example in this regard when dealing with George Butler and Dr. Kellogg deserves study. The former came around; the latter never did. The one was preserved as an honored worker in God’s cause; the other was a star that went out in darkness.

What made the difference? The circumstances they chose to make a part of their lives. And circumstances alter cases.

devil’s frantic argument after the close of human probation. Ellen White couches her account in the language of Zechariah 3, the story of Joshua and the Angel.

The remnant church.... are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness, and as they look upon themselves they are ready to despair. The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer....

Satan urges before God his accusations against them, declaring that they have by their sins forfeited the divine protection, and claiming the right to destroy them as

transgressors. He pronounces them just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. "Are these," he says, "the people who are to take my place in heaven and the place of the angels who united with me? While they profess to obey the law of God, have they kept its precepts? Have they not been lovers of self more than of God? Have they not placed their own interests above His service? Have they not loved the things of the world? Look at the sins which have marked their lives. Behold their selfishness, their malice, their hatred toward one another."

The people of God have been in many respects very faulty. Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these in the most exaggerated light, declaring: "Will God banish me and my angels from His presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Thy throne will not stand in righteousness and judgment. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them."²¹⁰

This is the ultimate conclusion of Satan's policy of self-seeking. This is what an uncompromising commitment to "policy" looks like. True enough, it's a display of total hypocrisy, brinkmanship diplomacy to the extreme. Satan has no desire for sinners to be punished; after all, he's first on that list. But his goal is to prove that God was wrong when He created man in the first place.²¹¹ To prove that God was wrong when He said "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts."²¹²

Lucifer has long claimed that God could not extend "mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," while still "by no means clearing the guilty."²¹³ "You can't have it both ways!" he screams. "Either forgive us all or kill us all."²¹⁴ But he's desperately trying to avoid an eternal truth: "Circumstances alter cases."

Those who have held fast their faith in Christ through the testing times at the close of this earth's history are in an entirely different set of circumstances than are fallen men and fallen angels. They have experienced—and demonstrated before the entire universe—the reality that the salvation of God includes the healing of the soul. The diseased are now well.²¹⁵

210. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, 474

211. Lucifer "opposed the creation of man." E.G. White, "Diary: January 1890," January 26, 1890; Manuscript 38, 1890

212. Jeremiah 31:33

213. Exodus 34:7

214. "The condemning power of Satan would lead him to institute a theory of justice inconsistent with mercy. He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure, and without fault. Thus he takes his position on the judgment seat, and declares that his counsels are infallible. Here his merciless justice comes in, a counterfeit of justice, abhorrent to God." E.G. White, Letter to Brother and Sister C.H. Jones, July 4, 1892; Letter 16a, 1892

"This counterfeit justice that Satan advocates, God abhors; it must not come into the experience of the sons and daughters of God." *Review and Herald*, September 22, 1896

215. In the New Testament, a single Greek word, *sozo*, is used for both healing and salvation. This is a major premise of my book *d'Sozo: Reversing the Worst Evil*. The details surrounding the ultimate "healing" of God's people is dealt with in my book *Diasozo! The Ministry of Controversy and the Great Healing*.

Satan would deny that circumstances alter cases. Satan would claim that it is unjust to treat the healed sinner differently than the unreformed transgressor of God's law. This, of course, is a lie prompted by selfishness. With lesser issues, we face a related danger every time we are tempted to allow policy to override what should be recognized as compelling circumstances.

For every imaginable excuse—ranging from simple laziness (*too much work to make an exception*) to professional self-protection (*I'll get fired if I don't follow the policy manual*)—the devil tempts us to deny circumstances their appropriate weight on whatever “cases” confront us day by day.

31. *The Book Is Better...*

Better than the movie, that is. But of course. Isn't it always? Still, for this one section, I ask you, gentle reader, to pretend that this is a movie, and as it comes to its end a list of credits scrolls upward on the screen. I've listed thirty genuine historical people who have been quoted or discussed in the preceding pages. And I think there are vitally important reasons for giving them a moment's more thought. When we're done with the list, I hope you're still with me to consider those ideas. So... credit where credit is due. Roll the tape!

The Cast, In Order of Appearance

Ellen White

The messenger of the Lord (which entailed more than I'm going to try to list).

W.C. White

Ellen White's son, pastor, and administrator who defended both “the regular channel” and the “gospel truth” that “the Lord is always making new channels.”

George F. Watson

A colporteur, pastor, evangelist, and president of the Colorado, South Dakota, and Montana conferences, who sought to safeguard the “regular channel” of denominational finance.

Persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe

A more nebulous group of unknown number, some of whom adopted alternative approaches out of concern with the “regular channel.” These included: 1) distributing their own tithe to needs they deemed appropriate; 2) requesting Ellen White to distribute some of their tithe; and 3) not paying tithe at all.

Lucy (“J.J.”) Gravelle

A “licensed missionary” well-known in multiple conferences who repeatedly requested Ellen White to disburse tithe money coming from herself and a friend.

J. Frank Gravelle

A well-known minister in multiple conferences who was commonly asked to serve on various church committees. Lucy's husband, about whose tithe-paying habits nothing seems to have been recorded.

Andrew Nelson

Director of the Manitoba Mission Field, given oversight of the Gravelle's evangelistic work over a period of eight months which resulted in the establishment of a church, consisting of fourteen believers.

S.A. Ruskjer

The Secretary of the Home Missionary Department of the Northern Union Conference, he stayed in the Gravelle's home once when visiting Fargo.

Sara McEnterfer

Ellen White's Chief-of-Staff and go-to local problem solver for thirty-one years. She held strong opinions in regard to the channel to be employed in the payment of tithe, but tolerated Ellen White's variations on that theme, and seems to have eventually modified her own thinking somewhat.

S.N. Haskell

Pioneer Adventist minister and administrator who expressed concern over the "multiplication of straps" in regard to the payment of tithe.

Walter Harper

A "veteran colporteur" who sometimes asked Ellen White to disburse some of his tithe to projects as she felt best.

Mrs. S.M. Oleson

A church member who wrote to Ellen White asking for counsel as to how to "dispose of her tithe." Ellen White declined to provide such counsel, and Sara closed her response letter with, "May the Lord give you wisdom is my prayer."

Charles Lightoller

Non-SDA sailor who survived two shipwrecks. As Second Officer of the Titanic, he was the one who most vigorously enforced the "women and children first" rule when it came to loading the life rafts. Later, he risked his own life and vessel in rescuing 130 stranded soldiers from the beach of Dunkirk.

Mrs. James Swingle

A lay member who made an inquiry regarding tithe. Sara McEnterfer's response encouraged her to return "tithe in the way that God directs," but not to "question in regard to its distribution." Irrelevant, but interesting: her granddaughter married Ellen White's grandson.

C.H. Jones

The long-time (1888–1923) general manager of the Pacific Press whom W.C. White “begged” to cooperate with Elder Irwin (then the GC president) and the Haskells in promoting a more expanded view of the “regular channel” idea.

Libbie Straight

Another lay member who wrote in another question about tithe in another letter that was not preserved. Again, Sara responded on Ellen White’s behalf.

Miss Eva Mangott

A church member who sent \$10 tithe to Ellen White, and asked as to the propriety of sending her tithe to some other place than her own church. On Ellen White’s behalf, Sara responded that “she could see no harm in it.”

W.A. McKenzie

A lay member from Advent Gulch, Idaho, to whom W.C. White pointed out the recent improvements in local conference policy as a reason to support the regular channel of denominational funding.

S.D. Hartwell

Vice-president of the West Michigan Conference who wrote to Willie for clarification on financial policy. Again, Elder White pointed to corrections made by local conferences as encouragement to support the regular channel.

C.E. Stewart

One of Dr. Kellogg’s “lieutenants” (as per Ellen White’s Letter 197, 1905). Stewart deliberately distorted the “Watson Letter” for the purpose of fueling the worst case fears of church treasurers everywhere. In his words, writing to Ellen White: “If people generally knew that you distributed your own tithe, and commended some others to do likewise, they would feel that it was their privilege to do the same, and by so doing would make it impossible to carry on a large ‘denominational machine.’”

Mrs. E.N. Douglass

Yet another inquirer, again given encouragement to support the regular channel on the basis that “during the last few years” her local conference had corrected some concerning policies that had previously been followed.

John C. McChesney

Another inquirer, to whom Sara McEnterfer emphasized the idea that “tithe-paying is a personal matter between the individual and his God.” Interesting trivia: Brother McChesney’s great-grandson, Andrew McChesney, is the editor of the *Mission Quarterly* used in Sabbath Schools.

Stewart Kime

President of the South Carolina Conference who foresaw “destruction to the whole system of tithing” if all church members were free to “choose the object on which they will bestow their tithe and place it there.”

Sydney Brownsberger

Veteran educator working to establish a new school in Naples, when money was so scarce as to deny him the regular necessities of life.

M.H. Johnston

Ordained minister who worked sacrificially to support medical missionary work, evangelism, and the development of self-supporting institutions. He established a school which incorporated a home for the aged and for orphans at Baker’s Mountain, North Carolina, and supported the nearby Hildebran Academy.

J. Edson White

Ellen White’s older son, an ordained minister who organized the Southern Missionary Society, which Arthur White’ described as “recognized by the General Conference as the agency largely responsible for the work of the church among the blacks” but which “was almost entirely a self-supporting work.”

G.I Butler

Veteran minister and administrator, president of the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Southern Publishing Association, Iowa Conference, Iowa-Nebraska Conference, Michigan Conference, Missouri Conference, Florida Conference, Southern Union Conference, and General Conference (twice). Additionally, he served on the board of the Southern Missionary Society and was willing to “say it fearlessly before this whole Conference.”

Etta Little-John

A convert of the Southern Missionary Society and one of the first students to attend Oakwood College. Her son, Charles E. Bradford, served as pastor, evangelist, president of the Lake Region Conference, associate secretary of the General Conference, GC vice president for North America, and president of the North American Division.

M.H. Brown

Secretary and Treasurer of the North Carolina Conference who supported independent schools as a welcome addition to the work in the conference.

O.A. Olsen

General Conference president whose less than stellar track record was forgiven, and who was rehabilitated to active—and positively productive—administrative service in the years following.

32. *In Retrospect*

I like that list. Almost all of them are what I'd call "good people," the kind I'd like to have as neighbors. There is one standout exception, sadly. C.E. Stewart has, I'm afraid, so totally lost my respect that I don't suppose anything but a very thorough explanation of some sort of death-bed conversion—best if delivered by Christ Himself—is likely to change my mind.

Even Charles Lightoller, the lone non-SDA on the list, seems to have had a good heart. Still, judging such matters is so far above my pay-grade that I'm happy to just wait and see. But wouldn't it be great if he ended up in heaven!

And then there are twenty-eight more. All Adventists. As far as I know, all trying to do what's right. All failing at times, I'm sure. I'd have a hard time judging those cases, too. For one thing, every one of those twenty-eight had their own unique circumstances to deal with. Nothing but the guidance of the Holy Spirit could keep them straight when faced with that kind of challenge. I don't know how they did, but wouldn't it be great if they all ended up in heaven!

Still, from all that we've looked at, I do think I can offer a few of good suggestions. For starters, be careful about elevating policy to the level that any deviation is a censurable offense.²¹⁶

That doesn't mean you should feel free to edit the Ten Commandments, nor that all policy is bad; it means policy is subject to circumstances and common sense. If that's confusing, may I politely suggest that you ask the Lord to strengthen your common sense. This elevation of human policy is built on a too-great certainty of what God requires from everyone else—despite the snowflake- and cloud-like difficulty of fully understanding anyone else's circumstances. Reform on this point seems appropriate for anyone telling others how to carry out the duty of tithing.²¹⁷

My second suggestion is to wrestle with the idea that God is actually in charge and capable of directing all who are willing to be directed. Our place in all this has more to do with encouraging others to be willing to be directed than it does with actually directing them.

Trusting *that* with God is more challenging than it might first appear, simply because you'd have to be blind or three days dead not to spot some failing

216. This concern was one reason the General Conference session of 1883 voted down a proposed *Church Manual*. The delegates—as explained later by the General Conference president—were concerned that, although the manual was described as “a book containing hints for the help of those of little experience, yet it must be evident that such a work, issued under the auspices of the General Conference, would at once carry with it much weight of authority, and would be consulted by most of our younger ministers.

“It would gradually shape and mold the whole body; and those who did not follow it would be considered out of harmony with established principles of church order.” G.I. Butler, *Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883. This story is told in my book, *Hindsight*.

217. See *Desire of Ages*, 616, quoted on page 39.

in everyone you work with. Gauging what that does to the person's ability to be led by the Holy Spirit is complicated. How many failings does it take before I conclude the guy just isn't listening to his conscience at all? If he eats between meals, can I still respect him as a pastor? Even if I know that he knows eating between meals isn't the ideal? Is that "lowering the standard"?

What if he violates a long- and widely held church policy? Do I condemn his work? Under what circumstances is it good or safe to sit down with the culprit and try to see his point of view? Memo: It's not always safe. Kellogg, for instance, in his "alpha apostasy" stage, was not one to sit and talk to. Ellen White was told not to at times.²¹⁸

Bear in mind my suggestion was that you "wrestle" with these ideas. If you think that's a simple task, you've got the wrong idea. Just saying.

Third on my list: I'd suggest giving some serious thought to what we've said about each other, especially in areas based on policies rather than commandments. In Romans 14, Paul discourages "disputes over doubtful things." It's a passage we may not like all that much, given its proclamation that "one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables"! Come on, Paul! Get with the program. Veganism is a real thing down here at the end of time!

Actually, I don't think my dietary choices would make Paul class me as weak, because I don't think that's the point he was trying to make. After all, he caps his reasoning with "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls."²¹⁹ Then, just for emphasis I presume, he loops back through the whole issue and winds up with "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."²²⁰

And finally, I commend to all this comment from Elder W.C. White:

But this much I will suggest to you, Brother Daniells, and that is my conviction that the brotherly and Christlike way to overcome the difficulties which our brethren are experiencing with the Madison school, is along the line of brotherly kindness, Christian forbearance, and real genuine self-sacrifice.²²¹



218. That story is in my book, *Tactics*.

219. Romans 14:4

220. Romans 14:10

221. W.C. White, Letter to A.G. Daniells, December 31, 1913; White Estate Archives Document 032260

It's almost like clockwork. Every couple decades there comes a fairly serious agitation over tithing. It's sad, not just because it tends to become a hot button issue that stirs up the saints, but because the historical record shows we've never really managed to meet the question in a way that produces much benefit.

This book isn't about "tithe agitation." It's about the principles involved in hundreds of ways and areas beyond all that. It's kind of common sense, really.



Dave Fiedler has bucked logs, farmed carrots, tomato seed, and hay, run a print shop, designed and milled dental crowns, been an editor, classroom teacher (elementary to college), boys' dean, school principal, vegan restaurant manager, and written five "real" books. (Plus a few little ones like this...

hardly big enough to count.)

At heart, he's something of a social-systems analyst, and the most fascinating social-system of all is the government of heaven and its remote operations here on earth. He believes making sense out of that is an obviously good move for the work of the gospel. For him, it's what makes getting out of bed worth the trouble.

Currently, he lives in "Beautiful British Columbia" with his wife, Clarissa.