



Our Attitude Toward the Civil Authorities

By some of our brethren many things have been spoken and written that are interpreted as expressing antagonism to government and law. It is a mistake thus to lay ourselves open to misunderstanding. It is not wise to find fault continually with what is done by the rulers of government. It is not our work to attack individuals or institutions. We should exercise great care lest we be understood as putting ourselves in opposition to the civil authorities. It is true that our warfare is aggressive, but our weapons are to be those found in a plain "Thus saith the Lord." Our work is to prepare a people to stand in the great day of God. We should not be turned aside to lines that will encourage controversy or arouse antagonism in those not of our faith.

We should not work in a manner that will mark us out as seeming to advocate treason. We should weed out from our writings and utterances every expression that, taken by itself, could be so misrepresented as to make it appear antagonistic to law and order. Everything should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as encouraging disloyalty to our country and its laws. We are not required to defy authorities. There will come a time when, because of our advocacy of Bible truth, we shall be treated as traitors; but let not this time be hastened by unadvised movements that stir up animosity and strife.

The time will come when unguarded expressions of a denunciatory character, that have been carelessly spoken or written by our brethren, will be used by our enemies to condemn us. These will not be used merely to condemn those who made the statements, but will be charged upon the whole body of Adventists. Our accusers will say that on such and such a day one of our responsible men said thus and so against the administration of the laws of this government. Many will be astonished to see how many things have been cherished and remembered that will give point to the arguments of our adversaries. Many will be surprised to hear their own words strained into a meaning that they did not intend them to have. Then let our workers be careful to speak guardedly at all times and under all circumstances. Let all beware lest by reckless expressions they bring on a time of trouble before the great crisis which is to try men's souls.

The less we make direct charges against authorities and powers, the greater work we shall be able to accomplish, both America and in foreign countries. Foreign nations will follow the example of the United States. Though she leads out, yet the same crisis will come upon our people in all parts of the world.

It is our work to magnify and exalt the law of God. The truth of God's holy word is to be made manifest. We are to hold up the Scriptures as the rule of life. In all modesty, in the spirit of grace, and in the love of God we are to point men to the fact that the Lord God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord.

In the name of the Lord we are to go forward, unfurling His banner, advocating His word. When the authorities command us not to do this work, when they forbid us to proclaim the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, then it will be necessary for us to say as did the apostles: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19, 20.

The truth is to be set forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. This alone can make our words effective. Only through the Spirit's power will victory be gained and held. The human agent must be worked by the Spirit of God. The workers must be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. They must have divine wisdom, that nothing may be uttered which would stir up men to close our way. Through the inculcation of spiritual truth we are to prepare a people who shall be able, in meekness and fear, to give a reason for their faith before the highest authorities in our world.

We need to present the truth in its simplicity, to advocate practical godliness; and we should do this in the spirit of Christ. The manifestation of such a spirit will have the best influence upon our own souls, and it will have a convincing power upon others. Give the Lord opportunity to work through His own agents. Do not imagine that it will be possible for you to lay out plans for the future; let God be acknowledged as standing at the helm at all times and under every circumstance. He will work by means that will be suitable, and will maintain, increase, and build up His own people.

The Lord's agents should have a sanctified zeal, a zeal that is wholly under His control. Stormy times will come rapidly enough upon us, and we should take no course of our own that will hasten them. Tribulation will come of a character that will drive to God all who wish to be His, and His alone. Until tested and proved in the furnace of trial, we do not know ourselves, and it is not proper for us to measure the characters of others and to condemn those who have not yet had the light of the third angel's message.

If we wish men to be convinced that the truth we believe sanctifies the soul and transforms the character, let us not be continually charging them with vehement accusations. In this way we shall force them to the conclusion that the doctrine we profess cannot be the Christian doctrine, since it does not make us kind, courteous, and respectful. Christianity is not manifested in pugilistic accusations and condemnation.

Many of our people are in danger of trying to exercise a controlling power upon others and of bringing oppression upon their fellow men. There is danger that those who are entrusted with responsibilities will acknowledge but one power, the power of an unsanctified will. Some have exercised this power unscrupulously and have caused great discomfiture to those whom the Lord is using. One of the greatest curses in our world (and it is seen in churches and in society everywhere) is the love of supremacy. Men become absorbed in seeking to secure power and popularity. This spirit has manifested itself in the ranks of Sabbathkeepers, to our grief and shame. But spiritual success comes only to those who have learned meekness and lowliness in the school of Christ.

We should remember that the world will judge us by what we appear to be. Let those who are seeking to represent Christ be careful not to exhibit inconsistent features of character. Before we come fully to the front, let us see to it that the Holy Spirit is poured upon us from on high. When this is the case, we shall give a decided message, but it will be of a far less condemnatory character than that which some have been giving; and all who believe will be far more earnest for the salvation of our opponents. Let God have the matter of condemning authorities and governments wholly in His own keeping. In meekness and love let us as faithful sentinels defend the principles of truth as it is in Jesus.

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