defection. The fact that the writers failed to mention these issues does not mean that they did not exist.

The attitudes of the apostates ranked third in importance as a contributing factor to apostasy. Many fell in love with the world and were attracted by its amusements. Intermarriage was listed as a factor but divorce and home problems were not mentioned as significant factors. Failure to attend Sabbath school and church services were considered contributing factors as were failure to read the writings of Ellen G. White and the official church paper, Review and Herald.

In 1930 a study was done on what happens to the youth from Adventist homes. It was discovered that in seventeen conferences 63 percent of the Adventist children were never baptized. Reportedly, more youth were lost due to lack of guidance than to lack of indoctrination. Denouncing and the negative were stressed more than giving positive answers and good reasons. In 1943 the Adventist World Church lost 27,045 members or 73.8 percent of its gain of 36,471. Of these heavy losses, 17,038 had apostatized (46.72 percent). In a twenty-year period baptisms in the United States were 191,992, but the apostasies were 90,521, and the net gain stood at only 92,618. Individuals were disfellowshipped for such trivial reasons as failure to report and as a result of rumors no one cared to investigate.


During the fifties, sixties, and seventies, fewer articles and entries on apostasy appeared in *The Ministry*. Whitsett pointed out that 94,848 members had dropped out of the church in the United States the previous sixteen years, and that as many as 90,000 former Adventists lived within the reach of most of the churches.\(^1\) The president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists made reference to an Adventist college community with more than one thousand former church members.\(^2\) It was pointed out that the critical time for apostasy was after about ten years of membership.\(^3\) The majority of disassociates did not leave the church because they disagreed with the Adventist doctrines, and it was inferred that many would go on through life defending the beliefs of Adventists to others.

The predominant attitude of Adventist leaders in the previous decades was stated by a non-Adventist observer: "You Adventists are very strange people. You will move Heaven and earth to make a convert. You will love them, pray for them, hold studies in their home, take them to meetings, do anything to get them into the church, and after they are in you treat them like the devil."\(^4\) However, a new and different emphasis can be detected in the articles written during

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the late fifties and sixties compared to the earlier decades. Apostasies are no longer blamed on failure to indoctrinate, premature baptisms, and on lowering the standards of the church to coerce the prospects. The emphasis seems to be on shepherding the flock, reclaiming backsliders, helping members to grow spiritually, and a concern for programs to retain the members. One strong appeal is, "while the church moves forward relentlessly, bent on finishing the work, in search of the spiritually unborn, the spiritually weak, the discouraged, the burdened, the indifferent, stand in the shadows and watch the procession from the side lines unnoticed, while their hearts long for the touch of a friendly hand, the invitation from a burdened heart for them to fall into line and rejoin the march to the city of God--but we are too busy to halt, too preoccupied with the work of God to really miss the missing."\(^1\) The admonition was 'to stem the tide of apostasy,' 'to feed the flock,' 'to close the door,' and 'block the exits' for those leaving the church. There was a new stress on preaching the Word of God, teaching the members how to think for themselves, and launching a new quest for Christian fellowship in the churches. The Ministerial Association organized 'operation concerned' and recommended the ministers to do something to regain the straying and the lost.\(^2\)


During the past seven years the problem of apostasy or disassociation has been almost entirely ignored by the writers in *The Ministry*. Two articles by non-Adventist writers on church discipline were reprinted in the journal during the early part of 1975. It would be interesting to learn why the Adventist ministers and church leaders have been silent on a problem which is still very much with the church.

In retrospect, the writers in *The Ministry* of the earlier decades were deeply concerned about losses of membership, and they searched for the reasons. They expressed that the principal factors leading to apostasy were: (1) lack of adequate indoctrination, (2) failure to be truly converted, and (3) neglect of pastoral care. It appeared that the responsibility for the losses of membership was frequently placed upon the ministers.

During the past twenty-five years the emphasis of *The Ministry* articles was more on retention of members and to some extent on the reclamation of those who left the church. However, many fewer entries were found during this period, and in recent years the problem of backsliding and apostasy are rarely mentioned. It seems that the individual who leaves the church rather than the minister and the congregation is blamed. There appears to be less interest in discovering the factors which lead to apostasy and what eventually causes separation from the church.
Articles Appearing in the "Review and Herald"
and Other Magazines

The Review and Herald, begun in 1849 as The Present Truth and merged in 1850 with The Advent Review to become The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, will for the purpose of clarity be referred to as Review and Herald.

Other Adventist periodicals which occasionally refer to apostasy and backsliding are The Signs of the Times, These Times, and local Union Conference papers, such as Lake Union Herald.

The articles in the Review and Herald, as well as the other church papers which deal with the problem of apostasy and defection from the church, frequently treat the problem from the prophetic and historical viewpoints. Occasionally an article also occurs in which the issue is discussed from the point of view of the contemporary church and the local congregation.

The interested reader is referred to the list of articles from the Review and Herald which is presented in appendix F.

Review of the Writings of
Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) was a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist church, a prolific writer, and accepted by the church as endowed with the prophetic gift described in the Bible. Her published works consist of sixty-four books and some 4,600 articles in the periodicals of the church besides pamphlets and other writings.

Ellen White frequently made references to and commented on the problem of loss of faith, backsliding, and apostasy. From
the reading of her writings it is evident that she used the word apostasy with a different connotation than it is used in this study. Backsliding is the first step on the treacherous path to apostasy; it is when man carries out his own will in opposition to the requirements of God;\(^1\) when man is influenced by a sinful world;\(^2\) and when man is neglecting prayer and religious life.\(^3\) Apostasy is the result of unbelief; lack of trust in God; ingratitude, a symptom of rebellion against God; and a deliberate refusal to walk in the light received from God. Sometimes she used the word apostasy as a synonym for rebellion and disobedience and the word apostate for Satan, whom she considered the root of all apostasy. It is evident that to her apostasy is far more than when a lukewarm person is drifting out of the church. It is the betraying of a sacred trust, a deliberate rebellion and opposition to the redeeming work of God as it is carried out through the church.

Ellen White pleaded that the contemporary church should learn from the repeated apostasies of Israel, the Jewish nation, and the church down through the ages. Otherwise, the children of God today would depart from the faith and be ensnared by Satan's deceptions.

\(^1\) Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* (May 10, 1881).


\(^3\) Ibid., 4:560.
She admonished the believers not to be discouraged when toward the end of the world the apostasies would increase. Even great leaders and talented workers in the church will defect, and at last a worldwide apostasy will develop into darkness as deep as midnight. But out of that night of darkness God's light will shine.¹ Only a union with Christ, a personal, living experience in the heart of the believer, will safeguard against apostasy.²

Some of the characteristics of backsliders and apostates, and some of the factors contributing to defection from the church were gleaned from her writings. The sequence of the listing is not significant.

Neglect to search the Scriptures
Neglect to pray to God
Failure to live up to one's profession
Failure to work in the church
Failure to trust in God
Refusal to follow revealed light
Resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit
Discouraged by opposition and persecution
Discouraged by delay of second coming
Unable to resist tests and trials
Rejection of inspired writings
Yielding to the practices of the world


²Ellen G. White, Manuscript release 439, MS 6, 1889.
Offended by others, hurt feelings, wounded pride.
Pride, selfishness, discontent, frivolity, disobedience, self-love
Self-reliance, unbelief, not dead to sin, and critical
Love of the world, love of material things, worldly advantages
Lack of conversion, form of godliness
Unholy character, unconsecrated
Uncharitableness, censoriousness, evil thinking and evil speaking
Hunger after pleasures and amusements
Influenced and deceived by others
Influenced by man-made theories and wrong assertions
To present the reader with a sample of Ellen G. White's writing on the problem of backsliding and apostasies at the end of the world, a list of selected quotations appears in appendix I.
CHAPTER III

GOD'S PEOPLE

The Seventh-day Adventist concept of church is fundamental to the discussion of apostasy, defection, backsliding and non-attendance. This chapter is by no means a comprehensive study on ecclesiology but a brief presentation of the biblical concept of the nature, purpose and function of the church. It also deals with the conditions for admission, conversion, church discipline, disassociation, and the Adventist church as it relates to other Christians.

When Christ stated, "I will build my church" (Mt 16:18), the Christians of the first century knew of what the Lord was speaking; they saw that church being built before their very eyes; they were forming it; they were the living church. The Christian of the twentieth century no longer knows to what the Lord was referring, because the word church contains for him a multitude of different notions.¹

Fifty years ago Bishop O. Dibelius pronounced the twentieth century the century of the church.² In the years that followed

²Ibid., p. 10.
extensive research was done on the subject, resulting in the publication of countless books on ecclesiology. During the past decade many books were written on church renewal espousing criticism and advocating reform. This concern may partly be a reaction against increasing secularism, nominalism, rationalism, and secularization of the Christian churches. There are some who feel that the churches of this century have deviated considerably from the pattern of the first century and, as a result, conservative denominations seem to prosper, while the mainline churches have encountered hard times and, some of them, considerable loss of membership.

Unfortunately, many of those who are preoccupied with church reform are also guided by revolutionary principles and desire to adapt the church to contemporary social thought and practice, to political ideologies, and to philosophies and ethics which are foreign to the Holy Scriptures. They give little evidence of an urge to restudy and follow the biblical concepts of church identity, nature, organization, conditions for membership, discipline, worship services, and the true mission of the church. However, an adequate concept of the church must arise from biblical sources rather than sociological inquiry or theological speculation.\(^1\)

The nature and purpose of the church was revealed by God and recorded in the Bible.

Many diverse terms, each with its own etymological and theological history, are used in the Bible to designate the church. The most significant in this context are ḡāḥal in the Old Testament, which generally refers to the meeting of Israel in an assembly and for a specified purpose, and ekklesia in the New Testament. In secular Greek ekklesia was used to mean "duly summoned assembly of the people," derived from the root meaning of "calling out citizens from their homes." In the New Testament writings ekklesia refers to the redeemed community or, at times, the sum total of man redeemed through Christ. Sometimes ekklesia means the particular community in a specified place or the community gathered together for worship. In the LXX it had taken on a religious meaning as the congregation of Israel.

More than one hundred cognate expressions are used in the Bible for the concept of the church. Most of these can be grouped under ten categories: (1) the saints and sanctified, (2) believers and faithful, (3) slaves and servants, (4) the people of God, (5) kingdom and temple, (6) household and family, (7) the new exodus, (8) vineyard and flock, (9) one body in Christ, and (10) the new humanity.¹

The New Testament uses nearly a hundred different metaphors and illustrations to describe the essence, meaning, and purpose of the church. No single figure dominates and serves as

the only and sufficient analogy of the community of believers.

As Minear points out:

... image after image points beyond itself to a realm in which God and Jesus Christ and the Spirit are at work. Through the diverse figures of speech, the early church recognized itself as a called community whose origin, boundaries and destiny were determined by the powerful promises of Him who sees the end from the beginning.¹

The plurality of illustrations testifies to the fact that the church is a mystery which cannot be fully grasped by man, but they also help to clarify the theological meaning. Consequently, it is not possible to reduce the concept of the church to an objective, qualifying definition, because it will always fail to take into consideration the whole biblical view of the church. The church is a many-sided entity which can be viewed as a spiritual entity, hidden to the world but visible to faith, and an organizational entity which is visible to the world but changes down through times and in different cultures. As a spiritual entity it is a relationship between God and man through Christ. God calls and men respond in faith. As an organization the church has had changing forms, depending upon age, culture, and condition, but always the same purpose to reveal and vindicate the true character of God and proclaim restoration of man through Christ the Messiah.

In principle the church was planned in the mind of God from eternity (Eph 1:4). It was established by Christ from the

creation of the world. In the beginning there was daily communication and a close relationship between Christ and the first people. This intimate relationship, however, was broken when man by his disobedience rebelled against God. Consequently, man's environment and relationship to other humans became distorted as a result of his negligence.

The first dwellers on earth chose to make a sanctuary in nature where they worshipped and communicated with Christ under the trees, as he met them with His gospel of grace. But in the ages to follow, humanity became degraded and the children of God were few. Still, "from the beginning faithful souls have constituted the church on earth. In every age the Lord has had His watchmen who have borne a faithful testimony to the generation in which they lived." The church started out as a family church which may be God's ideal. Berkhof states:

In the beginning of mankind the church was best represented in pious households, where the fathers served as priests. The members were known as the children of God to be distinguished from the children of men. In time of the flood, the church was saved in the family of Noah, and continued in the line of Shem. When true religion was dying out on earth, God made a covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants who were to be separate from the world. Up to the time of Moses the families of the patriarchs constituted the church. From Moses to Christ, Israel was God's people, the church of Old Testament times.

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The more formative church on earth began with Israel, God's Chosen People,¹ with whom he had entered into a covenant relationship (Dt 31; 1 Ki 8). They were called to be a kingdom of priests (Dt 19:6) who were to serve, teach, and proclaim the love of God. They were to make all people aware of His true character and to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation. They were a special people chosen to be channels of His grace to all men. They were God's representatives, lights in the moral darkness of the world, called to communicate to an unbelieving world the knowledge of the will of God and the wonders of His grace.²

God's Chosen People were not perfect. They were sometimes disobedient and failed to keep their promises; they frequently broke the covenant relationship with God; and they became backsliders and apostates. Their apostasy, however, was not that they not longer believed in the Lord, but that they failed to trust the Lord alone, and that they mixed pagan beliefs and practices with the revelation from God. At the time of Christ the Jews had turned away from the living truth and the power of God, and they were adhering to dead formalism.³ "The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages were


²Gottfried Oosterwal, of Andrews University, has written an excellent study guide, God's Chosen People (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, Third Quarter 1977), for Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath Schools. Concepts and ideas have been used freely from this study with his permission.

³White, Desire of Ages, p. 280.
appropriated for their own glorification. They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example."

It was always God's purpose that His Chosen People should be a light for the world. When they failed to keep their covenant relationship and to carry out the mission to which they were called, they lost their commission and eventually ceased to exist as God's Chosen People. As a result of apostasy God narrowed the dimensions of the people to those of a faithful remnant (Is 10:20-22) which was continued in the church of the New Covenant constituted in Jesus Christ (Gal 6:16; Rom 11:1-5; 1 Pe 2:9-10).

Messiah, the Promised One of Israel, was the constant hope and the Deliverer to come. When His coming was delayed, the Chosen People turned to salvation by works.² And when the deception of sin had reached its height and the fulness of time had come, Jesus, the Messiah, was incarnated among men (2 Cor 6:16; Rom 8:3). "The heart of infinite love was reaching out toward all the inhabitants of the earth. Though they had rejected Him, He was constantly seeking to reveal Himself to them, and make them partakers of His love and grace."³

The church in the days of Christ was a continuation of the Remnant of the Chosen People. Christ brought new meaning to them,  

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²White, Desire of Ages, pp. 34-36.  
³White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 368.
and the became a New People, a New Covenant Community, a New Humanity (Gal 6:16; Eph 2:15) empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Christ and the apostles reached out to all men, regardless of race and nationality, because God has no favored people (Rom 2:11; 2 Pe 3:9; 1 Ti 2:4, 6). Those who believed were baptized (Acts 20:7; Heb 10:25), and the church increased in number and spread into the known world.

In the Bible the church is presented as God's family on earth, a community of committed people who are bound together by belief in Jesus Christ. It is a people where social, racial, educational, and sexual distinctions have lost their significance (see Gal 3:28). It is a people that comprise a priesthood of all believers (1 Pe 2:9); that is, it also includes a ministry by the laity (Eph 4:11, 12).

Ideally speaking, the church is in this world but not of the world (Jn 17:16, 18). It is a body of saints and at the same time sinners, human and divine (for the weeds and the wheat shall grow together until the end [Mt 13:24-30, 36-43]). It is chosen to serve as a model for the world but may frequently fall short of the Divine purpose. Gottfried Oosterwal suggests that the model of salt teaches the lesson that the church should succeed and be influential by being involved, by participating in the world, by permeating, and infusing the world. At the same time it always takes a chance of becoming too much like the world, and of losing its identity. As the model of building, the church has the opportunity to become a holy community different from the world, but
it also entails the danger of becoming too concerned with its own holiness and becoming isolated from the world. 1

The household church eventually developed and grew into large groups which met in larger halls and churches. As the number grew the form and content of human relationships changed.

The church of the Bible was never a static society. It has always been presented as a living, dynamic, changeable, and progressive fellowship of believers who responded to a call from God and, consequently, committed themselves to live a consecrated life in obedience to the revealed will of God.

The church should not be viewed as an institution or socio-religious corporation. It is a profound spiritual reality whose origin and destiny are divine and whose life is dependent upon God's call and man's response. It is a body of unique and peculiar people, intrinsically different from any other group of people. It is not concerned with conformity to the mores and values of the world, but aspires to reflect the character of God and carry out His purposes. If the church is fulfilling its purpose, the world will recognize it by the members' love for others (Jn 13:35) and by its unity of purpose. The members are united with Christ and with one another. One church, one Lord, one Gospel, and one mission (Eph 4:5, 11-13).

Christ, as the head and leader of the church, works through it to reconcile the world with God and to redeem men (Rom 5:10).

1 Oosterwal, God's Chosen People, p. 53.
All of its spiritual power is concentrated, in love, to redeem human beings from every nation and race, and from every walk of society. Redeemed persons are to be instrumental in leading others to redemption and, through this work, to hasten the coming of the Lord.

Therefore the church is the People of God, the congregation of His children in Christ (1 Th 2:14). It is a visible, witnessing community of people who can be recognized primarily by their love of God and fellowmen, and who have covenanted to reveal the character of God and to restore and reconcile men through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not as yet worked out an official theology of the church. This may have many reasons but could be due to the fact that Adventists initially did not want to start another church; they viewed themselves as a revival movement to warn all people of the impending judgment and the coming of Christ.

In certain countries the word "church" is avoided by Adventists because it has connotations of state church or the Roman Catholic church. Some Europeans, for example, prefer to use other terms. They belong to the Adventist community, they attend meetings, or go to the temple to worship, but not to "church." In the United States, however, the term "church" is used freely by Adventists for the building of worship, the congregation, and the denomination.
According to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, the church has a unique concept of its existence and fulfillment of a divine purpose to gather out a people from among all people from the far corners of the earth in order to bind them into one unified body in Jesus Christ. All who are children of God in Christ are members of this family, and they have a unique relationship with each other and a fellowship with their Lord and Master.

It is the distinctive belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that its rise was predicted in the books of Daniel and Revelation; that it was specifically called by God to proclaim a last warning message to the world before the end of time; that this message is mentioned in the book of Revelation, chapter 14; and that the essence of the message is: (1) the time of God's judgment has come, (2) man must return to worship the creator of the universe who also instituted the Seventh-day Sabbath, (3) God's people should proclaim to all people that salvation and restoration is available through the grace of Jesus Christ, (4) and they should invite others to come out from apostate Christianity from the world of unbelief and the religions of the world and join God's Remnant Church on earth before the Second Advent.

This means that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has accepted a mission similar to that of ancient Israel and the apostolic church. It means that Adventists consider themselves

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God's true church, comprised of all genuine children of God who in the time of the end will find it necessary to leave their respective churches in order to remain faithful to their conscience and commitment to Christ. The Adventist Church believes that presently the children of God are found scattered among the numerous denominations of all faiths, but as they become aware of the nearness of the coming of the Lord they will voluntarily join in a family, the Remnant People who are preparing to meet their Lord and reflect His character in their lives. It is the distinct belief of the church that the end-time calls for a definite choice between the worship of Christ, the Creator, and worship of "the beast and his image" (Rev 13:12, 15; 14:9). The reader who is interested in a more detailed study of the Adventist self-concept is referred to extensive literature on the subject, for example, the S.D.A. Bible Commentary.¹

Adventism is strongly rooted in this self-concept, and it is important to keep this in mind when membership and disassociation are discussed. To become an Adventist frequently means to leave another persuasion and to accept the hardships which follow when relatives and friends disapprove and, sometimes, oppose the

decision. It also means that the person has or develops a strong conviction that the Adventist church is God's Remnant People in the end-time. Consequently, those who have joined the church on such premises find it extremely difficult to join any other church if they disassociate from the Adventist Church.

Church Membership

The local Seventh-day Adventist church admits new members by vote of its members and subject to certain prerequisites. Admission is granted on the following conditions:

1. Transfer of membership from another Adventist church, provided the sending church had voted the transfer and sends the letter of transfer to the clerk of the receiving church. A vote by the church board, two readings in the church, and a vote by the congregation is obligatory.

2. Acceptance on profession of faith. This is also by church action as described, and it presupposes baptism by immersion at a previous church. Rebaptism is generally required if the person was previously disfellowshiped.\(^1\)

3. Baptism by immersion which is subject to faith and conversion. Prior to baptism candidates should publicly affirm their beliefs and willingness to live according to the standards of the church.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church admits members on a spiritual basis which involves a spiritual relationship to God and

\(^1\)Church Manual, pp. 249, 255.
to man. When the person makes the decision to join the church, it is expected to be based on free choice and a personal request to unite with God's family through baptism (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22-23; 4:2).

Membership presupposes that the person:

1. Is urged by the Holy Spirit
2. Accepts salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
3. Was thoroughly instructed in all major beliefs of the church
4. Acknowledges and repents of sin
5. Realizes the solemn obligations and expectations of church membership
6. Presents evidence of being born again
7. Is prepared to accept a new life through a spiritual union with Jesus Christ and to be sustained by grace.

The person's belief should be more than merely mental assent to the doctrines of the church. It should involve personal commitment to Jesus Christ based on the experience of conversion, which is the transformation of the mind, attitude, and, gradually, of the character. It is the work of the Holy Spirit and involves recognition and sorrow for sin, a decision to submit to the will of God, and a complete surrender to depend upon Christ for salvation and victorious Christian living. It is the beginning of the complete restoration, through the grace of Christ, of the divine character, which was lost through sin.
Baptism expresses a spiritual experience in Christ as no other act can do, appropriately symbolized by Paul as death, burial, and resurrection to a new life in Jesus Christ. Ellen G. White states: "If we are true to our [baptismal] vow, there is opened to us a door of communication with heaven—a door that no human hand or satanic agency can close." Baptism must be a reality, a personal experience, rewarded with the reception of the Holy Spirit, and its vow needs renewal all through life.

Prior to baptism a person should be thoroughly instructed, publicly examined before the church, willing to assume the responsibilities of church membership (including witnessing his faith in Jesus Christ) and finally, willing to seal his new covenant relationship with God through baptism. One premise for baptism frequently not understood is that each new member simultaneously becomes a member of the priesthood of all believers. "You are a royal priesthood . . . God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people" (1 Pe 2:9-10).

The believer who is baptized enters into a fellowship with the family of God, and his name is added to those already in the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 12:13). Regeneration, baptism, and church membership is not an attained end; it is rather the beginning of a lifelong spiritual development. Christian growth

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is necessary for spiritual development. Christian growth is necessary for Christian life. Further instruction and new experiences are needed in order to grow and develop into spiritual maturity and perfection in Christ. This necessitates determined effort on the part of the believer, fellow believers, and those chosen to nurture the church (Mt 28:20; 2 Ti 28:20). Every effort to develop the believer spiritually, be it by teaching, dialogue, preaching, or by study and contemplation, will have the added benefits of improving the fellowship and intercommunication as well as conserving members.

Church Discipline

The concept of church discipline is biblical. The very nature of the church\(^1\) implies the necessity of such discipline, but it only takes on real meaning in the redemptive community of believers. God's Chosen People in Old Testament times frequently broke the covenant relationship with God, and discipline and admonitions for restoration became necessary. The theology and discipline of His People demanded separation from and nonconformity to the world, and in case of violations there were only two alternatives, repentance or separation. Because God was holy, His people too must be holy. Deviations led to either expulsion or the death penalty. Some typical examples were: idol worship,

\(^1\) Christiansen, p. 22. The nature of the church depends upon the institution for creating, nurturing, and extending the fellowship. The church exists to serve the fellowship. Discipline is necessary or the church is inoperable.
contempt of Yahweh, sexual offenses, ritual offenses, and social crimes.

In the New Testament church discipline is strongly advocated. When Jesus said, "The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7:14), He certainly implied disciplined Christian living as a prerequisite to entering the kingdom. Paul recognized that discipline is essential to the life of the church. In his letter to the church at Corinth he made it clear that the church of which Christ is the head must have and uphold standards.\(^1\) Not to submit to the reign of God in Christ is to sin and put oneself under the rule of the adversary. The wages of sin is death.

Discipline is intimately related to the concept of the church. As stated by the Mennonite, Cornelius Krahn:

It is along the demarcation line between the body of believers and the sinful world that church discipline becomes necessary. Only where there is no distinction between the church and the world, is there no church discipline. Wherever there is an awareness of the holy God who does not approve of sin and wherever there is conversion, regeneration, and sanctification through Christ as Savior, there is a fellowship of believers, a separation from the world, consecrated Christian living, and church discipline.\(^2\)

Discipline is the effort of the church to correct shortcomings and perfect a person's love and allegiance to God. It is an attempt to help the brother/sister who is in danger of slipping

\(^{1}\) 2 Cor 5:17; 6:9; 12:19, 20; 1 Ti 1:20; Tit 2:11-13, 15; Heb 12:6, 7; 1 Cor 11:32; 5:5; 3:10; Acts 5:1-11; Eph 2:12.

and, perhaps, abandoning faith in God and the church. It is not to get even with another person, it is not a punishment per se, but it should always be formative, "for the perfection of the saints." It is a rescue action, an attempt to save rather than condemn. Therefore, discipline is an inescapable consequence of the disciplining process of proclaiming the Gospel, because such an act is a corollary of evangelism which is the initial act of disciplining.¹ Consequently, biblical church discipline begins with a concern for persons whose spiritual conditions have fallen short and who may be unaware that they are backsliding and of its consequences. It is always the duty of the church to show a person his spiritual condition and not to pretend that he is a Christian after he has ceased to be one.

The first step in church discipline is admonition of the erring member (Mt 18; Lk 17:3; 1 Ti 5:20; 2 Ti 3:16; Tit 1:13; 2:15). The true purpose of discipline is to be a remedial measure in order to produce remorse.

Admonition is a reminder that God cannot tolerate sin. It is an attempt to prevent presumptuousness and backsliding on the part of the erring, and it is a safeguard to the witness of the church. The ultimate goal is the restoration of the sinner through a living relationship with Jesus Christ who transforms the believer's life. In this connection, it should be remembered that a condition for membership in the church is the repentance of sin.

Likewise, that forgiveness is contingent upon a change of life and renewed commitment to God through the grace of Jesus Christ.

If the person refuses to reform, the church is compelled to recommend expulsion (excommunication). This authority is not readily accepted by all people, but it is part of the gospel. The motivation for expulsion is to: (1) preserve the holiness of God and vindicate His character; (2) be consistent with the proclamation of the church; and (3) deter further sinful acts. While the church always leaves judgment to God, it needs to retain its internal discipline to avoid dissolution in the world (Mt 18:18; Acts 5:1-12; 2 Th 3:14, 15; 2 Cor 2:5-7).

The Seventh-day Adventist church has always advocated and practiced some form of discipline. The severity with which it is carried out depends upon time, place, and the local church leaders. It is to be remembered that it is the duty of the church and its officiating ministers to make sure that a person understands and accepts the major beliefs and the high ethical standards of the Adventist church before he is baptized and becomes a member.

The church recommends that erring members should be contacted and encouraged to repent and put their "house in order." If a person ignores the admonition, discipline becomes necessary to preserve the integrity and reputation of the church. Either

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one of two procedures may be followed: a vote of censure or a vote to drop the person from membership. A vote of censure is taken to show the disapproval of the church, but it does not include loss of membership. The purpose is to show publicly that the church does not approve of the censured behavior and to warn the member that he is expected to change his life in conformity with the beliefs and standards of the church. During the period of censure the member will not be permitted to hold church office nor to transfer his membership to another Adventist church.

A vote to disfellowship a member is the final step and usually takes place only after he has shown continuous blatant disregard for the beliefs and standards to which he once promised to adhere at the time of his baptism.

Among the causes for expulsion are: denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the principal doctrines of the church; conduct which violates the moral and ethical codes of the church; deliberate violation of the Ten Commandments; addiction to narcotic drugs and other harmful substances; and rebellious opposition to the organized and elected leaders of the church.¹

The minister and the church officers cannot disfellowship a member. Such action may be taken only at a duly called meeting of the church and by majority vote of those present. Prior to disfellowshipping, it is the duty of the minister and the church

¹Ibid.
leaders to visit with the erring member once more to urge repentance rather than to recommend disfellowshipping. Members cannot be dropped for nonattendance, failure to support the church financially, or for variance in interpretation of apocalyptic writings. A person who has been disfellowshipped has a right to appeal to the conference in which the church is situated. If the conference recommends that he be reinstated, the church has a right to refuse him membership, and the conference may then recommend him to membership in some other church.

Adventist churches should, probably, maintain stricter discipline. Some large churches report few dropouts, and these are frequently those who have requested being dropped from church membership. Yet, many members fail—by their own admission—to live according to the beliefs and standards of the church. Such members do not fulfill the objective of the calling of the church and have essentially separated from the church.

It is the responsibility of the church to work for those who went astray and to engage in soul winning for those who are slipping and on their way out. Those who have been disfellowshipped should be shown love and compassion and encouraged to full restoration in Jesus Christ. "Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (2 Th 3:15). A former member may be reinstated upon confession, evidence of repentance, and after rebaptism.

The church must also remain mindful of the parable of the wheat and the weed (Mt 13:26-30; 36-43). Be patient until the harvest. Only God can separate effectively and finally. In the
meantime, He works through the church for restoration of man which is readmission to fellowship with Christ and one another.

Ministers are admonished to have hearts "filled with love for the poor lost sheep of the house of Israel. Hunt for the backsliders, those who once knew what religion was, and give them the message of mercy."¹ The church is urged to be compassionate to those who err and leave the church,² because God never ceases to invite undeserving sinners to return ( Isa 55:6, 7). He never gives up those who choose their own ways and leave the church.³

Apostasy in the Church

In the Bible the term apostasy refers to rejection, abandonment, and renouncing. A person may renounce faith in God or in the doctrines of the church directly or implicitly. Sometimes a person may leave the church because he is merely a nominal believer (1 Jn 2:19). He may also choose to leave the church for other reasons. Branches, which appear to belong to the true vine but are not in vital union, will be cut off (Jn 15:6).

Apostasy is the opposite of baptism. The latter signifies entrance, the former means exit from the church. Apostasy may be viewed as synonymous with disassociation, but in the traditional sense, to apostatize from the church is to show contempt for God


and to crucify Christ anew (Heb 6:6). It is a repudiation of the church and all it stands for in the world. It is a deliberate separation from the Christian fellowship and, sometimes, it involves rebellion and fierce opposition. It is defection from what a person formerly believed in. Sometimes it may mean abolishment of one's former values, and a life style acquired over many years. The life style of a Seventh-day Adventist is very different from the one of most other Christians. Therefore, to leave the Seventh-day Adventist church can become a very traumatic experience, requiring changes and adjustments in a person's life. It is known that many former Adventists still retain part of their original life style, and many continue to defend Adventist beliefs and practices.

The theological consequences of apostasy in ancient Israel were severe. The apostate was to be mercilessly destroyed (Dt 13:12-18; 17:2-7).

In the Islamic religion apostasy is considered the sin of cowardice, and it is punishable with death. In accordance with Adventist theology, it would be better for a person never to have joined the church, if the person later becomes a backslider or apostate who does not return to Jesus Christ.

"Rebellion and apostasy are in the very air we breathe," stated Ellen G. White. Again she says:


Those who have once been convicted of the truth, but have resisted the Holy Spirit's influence, walk and work in co-partnership with Satan, the first apostate. Blinded by the sophistry of him who was once found in the heavenly courts, they join his ranks. The apostle Paul, speaking of this, says, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." Those who have turned away from a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," will be blinded in a superstitious faith in every kind of apostasy, and will be led into that errible iniquity which God's word represents as being drunken with the blood of saints. . . .

And will the true child of God be carried away by the prevailing iniquity? Will the chosen of God be tempted by the universal scorn which he sees put upon the law? Will he think less of that law, and give it less honor and obedience?--No; the prevailing apostasy will fill his soul with zeal for the honor of God.1

The Adventists consider it a serious step to separate from the church. This can only be understood in the light of the Adventist unique self-concept2 which embraces the strong belief that they are not just another church but a world-wide movement, called by God to spread the Gospel and warn the world of the impending return of Jesus Christ (Rev 12:7; 14-17). Their supreme commission is to reveal to all mankind God's nature, character, and plans for restoration of man. They are the light of the world (Mt 14:16) which means they are shining for others by revealing in their lives the character of God. They adhere to a strong doctrinal system which is referred to as The Truth, and it includes all the truth for man as revealed in the Bible. Consequently

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1Manuscript 143, 1901, pp. 25-26 (Review and Herald, August 31, 1897).

2For more detailed discussion of the church's position on church membership, the true church, the truth, and relationship to other Christians, see footnote 1, page 92.
when a person leaves the church, he gives up the truth. In a sense to give up the truth is to give up Christ, and to separate oneself from Christ is to give up salvation.

Adventists believe that every person must make a choice between loyalty to God or repudiation of God. The issue is either/or, obedience/disobedience, either a person commits himself to Christ and becomes a member of His Body or he remains outside of Christ, which excludes salvation. A person must live up to all the light God has revealed to him. Subsequently, it would be better never to have joined the church than reject the light and defect. The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10), but no man is saved against his will.

The Adventists' relationship to the world can be summed up in a few sentences. God has a multitude of true children in all denominations (Jn 16:16) but the time will come, according to the Adventist understanding of the prophetic word, when all true Christians will unite in preparation for the coming of Christ. Adventists believe that their movement in the end of time will be the only church loyal to the truth as revealed in Scripture.

Therefore in the Adventist view, it is a necessity to remain in Christ and in the church. The person who disassociates from the church may eventually also forsake Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. To break with Christ and the church is to abandon salvation, to exclude oneself from the Kingdom of God, to choose the side of the enemy, and to give up eternal life.
The interviews revealed that a majority of the respondents still adhere to the belief that Adventists have the truth, and they are God's people, preparing for His return. This may account for the fact that only a few had joined other churches and more than two-thirds stated they hoped to rejoin the church again some day.