

voluntary-choices

Some leave because they had a set of views to which they came to be converted.

There were people in times past, a few in number, one small group whose perspective I think I could say very clearly, their leader was converted to Herbert W. Armstrong and not Jesus Christ.

I told that to Mr. Armstrong and he agreed, of course.

You may not know of that particular group.

There are people who are converted to a particular set of views.

That is, if you change it, then the person chooses not to remain.

There was a lovely lady many, many years ago who was like that from the Eugene Oregon congregation, a person who made significant contributions to the work in her life and efforts, but she functioned on the basis of a certain set of views.

And when, indeed, the church grew at that time to understand or, in one case, to reverse a matter she left, which matter was so small, we can call it makeup.

Now, personally, I wouldn't leave the church over that.

If I were a woman and happily as a man, generally, we don't have to wear it unless we're in West Hollywood.

But it's sad when people make decisions on such small matters and do not know how to cope with them.

I suggested to this lady that she be careful and respectful of those who have left the fellowship to become a part of another where they essentially have a different attitude.

And I can say, as I told her that I have met some who have left, one man stopped as I was walking on a sidewalk while he was driving a vehicle.

Another man was actually walking essentially in the same direction I was, and so we greeted each other in both cases.

And I did not find the same spirit that I remembered before they left.

So I can only tell you that this happens, and to think it doesn't, would be untrue.

And for those who do, who do not know that that spiritual change has occurred, they would not see it, but their behavior becomes different.

And this lady said that in terms of the spirit, even though many of the brethren in this congregation where we have been attending may have different views, I find that those who have left who might even agree more with me don't have the same spiritual attitudes any longer.

So I want you to understand what happens.

It is important also to recognize what this lady has done, and that is how to address the matter of communication in a public situation and in private.

There are, she said, and I will just be very plain, I haven't mentioned the area, it doesn't matter, but I think it wiser not to, she said if I talk with anybody, because she is a kind of remnant of those who had certain views more akin to what is thought to be of the past, she said others come to me and walk by to hear what I say.

I said that's very simple to solve.

When they do, invite them to stop and chat with you.

But do it in the way that you should do it if Jesus Christ were to knock at your door.

There is a church mentioned in Revelation 3, it chances to be the last one.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus knocks at the door of the individual, now if he knocked at your door and you were discussing things, there would be generally two ways of responding.

One would say, oh, Jesus is there, let's change the topic.

My premise would be, and I hope it is yours, oh, Jesus is there, he is the man who can answer the very question we were asking, I don't have to change the topic.

In other words, if I communicate with you, I'm prepared to assume that you are not really the one that I'm talking to.

It could be anybody else who wishes to come by, and if it is personal and you don't wish it discussed and we don't discuss it at all in a public situation.

We should distinguish between what is wise and what is not wise to discuss.

If you understand this, you will then be able to invite anybody who walks along and we won't have people who are curious as to why other people are discussing things.

As many of you know, people sometimes stand around with me and I will ask somebody else to come in and invite an identity, because I don't know who all of you may be, and to participate in the conversation.

I think there are some things that are not the wiser to discuss.

I would simply say, look, that is a question that you should address to personal correspondence department, or that is a question that is better answered by information in a book that could be duplicated, that prevents inaccuracy, or simply that is a question that is being discussed for which no answer is yet forthcoming, or it may be a one that I would regard as sufficiently unwise that I would rather not mention it as an answer, even if I may know.

Now, I advised this morning, and I want you to know, not to have the list of the names of the ministers read when our host asked about the question, because it doesn't pertain to this area, and it is a decision between the individual and church administration, and in fact, there are still decisions going on, and I think it is simply better not to become so personal that everyone hears names that are not necessarily relevant in your area.

Any that are listed there, to my knowledge, are in the fellowship of the church, and have no intention to leave, so let me say that, but there are ways to go about things that I would like to address here, and we need to perhaps look at what Paul said.

Paul said that the things that happened to the children of Israel were written for our learning.

The things that happened to the children of Israel in the 40 years of wandering were written for our learning.

I must say, I regret today, that there is a tendency not to know what is in the Old Testament as much as we used to be able to communicate.

You see, Paul wrote these letters at a time when the source of his information was not merely the teaching of Jesus Christ, but the written form of the message of God, the word of God, that we do call the Old Testament.

But not everybody has understood what that part of the Bible is for.

When Mr. D'Cotche's letter came out in December, after I had made some suggested edits and had not reviewed it after the final edits were made, and I want to correct something here in case any of you misunderstood or it was not explained fully accurately, I am not responsible and never have been for all that is published in the work.

I was asked to be a general editor, an executive editor of the Plain Truth.

I do go over almost all that is in the Pastor General's report, as in the Plain Truth, almost, because necessarily their last minute captions in the Plain Truth, or information that comes to church administration that cannot make the rounds before things are published.

But that's simply procedural.

But I do not normally edit the Worldwide News, though if I chose to talk to the editor about something that I would be concerned about in advance, I would ask.

I do go over other individual items and do go over the booklets in general, but I do it at that point at which I give my input, and I am privileged to be more critical on print, in print on paper, than most ministers should ever be in the pulpit.

That is a privilege, let's say, that comes with being an editor and operating in a room.

I might be critical even of how the truth is presented.

I might be critical of something that I do not find adequately demonstrated, but it's between myself and the other editors, and I am not the final editor just so you know, and don't misunderstand anything that may have been said.

And it is important now to take a look at the significance of the experience that Paul draws attention to.

But before I go to the wilderness wandering, let me give you another illustration that some in the ministry may have heard, interestingly.

There was a time that there were two individuals in a garden, and the eternal God was not there to communicate directly to Adam and Eve, so you know the setting, but another personality was there.

Some things occurred that upset the minds of Adam and Eve, and it came to them that they should sow fig leaves together, and no sooner had they done that than they heard God, shall we say, coming to himself or whatever you wish, in a form that was visible and audible, and God got there just too late.

If only God would have been on time, the problem wouldn't have happened.

Now the late Mr. God has something to answer for then, doesn't he? Because he should have been there to stop what had occurred.

Why didn't he? Why was he late? Well that's a sermon in itself, but let's go to another case.

Why did God take the children of Israel not to the Promised Land, but he took them away from the Promised Land down the shores to the shores of the Sea of Reeds or the Red Sea? They had in fact gone in the direction that led them to the walls on the eastern side of Egypt that separated modern Egypt proper from the region of the Sinai Peninsula, and instead of heading the simple direction on the way of the Philistines where a mighty God could certainly have put an end to any Philistine army, God led them down into a wilderness area.

It wasn't one long wall, so that they had a wilderness area, and instead of leading them on the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez, he got them trapped on the west side.

But didn't God know geography any better than that? If God was God, why did he ever lead them to the shores of the Red Sea and do nothing about Pharaoh's army that suddenly showed up? I want you to think about it.

God wasn't there in the Garden of Eden in time.

He made the mistake of leading them to the western shore of the Gulf of Suez, and now with Pharaoh's army who weren't swallowed up in some earthquake, the Israelites were trapped.

Now you had a choice.

Jesus Christ exemplifies that in his life, not my will, but thine be done, he said to the Father, and so the eternal God said to Moses, listen carefully, he said, jump right in and swim.

That's your only chance.

No, he didn't at all.

He just said, sit still, stand still.

Some of you sit and some stand, let's say, but stand still and watch what God will do.

Watch what God will do.

Well, the rest of the story is important.

God did do something, but sometimes people want to do something in advance.

Then after the crossing of the Red Sea, you have the story of the children of Israel at Sinai, which we will pass by, and take them the next year to the border of the Promised Land on the south near the city of Arad in the upper Negev.

And there were men who were searching out the land, which was necessarily a military custom, and came back and, after 40 days wandering, delivered a report.

Out of the 12, there were two who delivered a good report and 10 who delivered a bad one.

Now there was a later time when Aaron's two sons, listen carefully, offered an offering by fire that was inappropriate, and no sooner had they thought to present an inappropriate offering that God, from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, zapped them, and they were dead.

Now why didn't God zap the 10 who brought the evil report? Do you notice God doesn't always do the thing the same way? In one case, he let them deliver the evil report, and in another case, he punished two men and they were instantly dead.

You remember Uzzah at the Ark? You probably would have said that that was going to an extreme, but why did God let the 10 give a report? Because this was to be a test, a test of the children of Israel and a test of those who were sent to bring back a report.

God intended that Adam and Eve should be tested.

God tested Abraham and asked him to do something, and Abraham showed he was willing to do that, and God stopped it at that instant.

God told the children of Israel, trust me, but he didn't explain how, and the children of Israel were delivered across the Red Sea.

Now when the children of Israel heard the false report, which you will find written up in the book of Numbers in Detail, the remarkable thing is that they decided to believe the false reports as a whole, and the children of Israel made an interesting decision.

Some of them said, in any case, we will go up anyway when God said, you're not going to go up, you will spend the remainder of a 40-year period, they had already been more than one year, in the wilderness, so they were going to have to spend 40 years in the wilderness altogether.

And some said, no, you told us we were to go in, we've changed our minds, we're going to take it anyway, and it's interesting what happened.

God's help, those who thought that they ought to go in, who first had believed the wrong reports, and then changed their minds, they were beaten by the Canaanites, and some perished.

God and those who were willing to follow the instruction of Moses had already left the camp and moved south, and the refugees of those who were pursued by the Canaanites learned a lesson, and the children of Israel were tested for 40 years in the wilderness.

They also had a responsibility to train their children.

Now Paul tells us that all these things were written for our learning.

It would have been nice, wouldn't it, to have inherited the land of Canaan, which God had promised? But no, you had to spend, let's say you were 50 years of age, you had to spend a little more than, a little less than another 40 years, or you would be essentially in your late 80s before you would see the promised land.

Now that generation, in fact, did die except for Joshua.

The women are not directly mentioned as to who did or who did not, and Caleb, even Moses and Aaron and the sister died, but it was important to realize that there is perhaps more than you think to a time of testing, and we are going through in the church today a time of testing, of testing your intellect, of testing your mind, and testing your attitudes in your spiritual state.

This is the test of the ministry, this is the test of parents, this is the test of brothers and sisters as children in a family, this is the test of administration.

The 40 years wandering was also a test.

Now what had to happen in those 40 years was very important.

In fact, looking back, we can now see what that generation couldn't see.

The generation that came out of Egypt was not prepared to look at things as God had explained them at Sinai.

They were not prepared to have the concept of the forgiveness of debt.

They were not prepared to understand property rights as God laid them out with respect to the Jubilee year.

They were in fact looking at things through Egyptian eyes, and that generation was not physically, emotionally, or mentally prepared to establish the culture, the traditions, the law, the practice, the way of life that God was laying out for the children of Israel, the judicial system, the civil, the religious system.

There was to be an example of enlightenment to the world around, but the children of that generation, some of whom were young when they came out of Egypt, had 40 years to learn.

They had 40 years to learn what life was about.

They were tested and tested and tested, and God was always leading them in some way that they had to meet a new problem.

God has not promised you that you would not have problems.

He has said he would not test you beyond your endurance, and if you think you're beyond your endurance, what you are really telling God is you're not prepared to endure in whatever area this test may be.

When that generation died that was older and the new generation entered the Promised Land, we have something very interesting that we read about.

After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel under the elders continued to maintain the way of life that God laid out at Sinai and through Moses spoke in the book of Deuteronomy, which is the book of the law.

That generation did the will of God.

Now that doesn't mean they were all converted, this is not what I am saying, but they did the will of God as it was laid out in the letter of the law in the Old Covenant.

And as a result of that, a new way of life and culture was firmly established.

How many of us come from outside the fellowship of the church? I am speaking now as someone much older than when I came into the fellowship of the church.

Some of you are first generation born into a congregational relationship, and some few of you may be already second, and who knows, here there could be third, if children are very young.

But growing up in the church and growing up outside the church do change perspectives.

And I would like to address this to help you understand.

I am of course asked to speak this afternoon, and some things I will address now.

I will not address this afternoon.

In the afternoon there will be people who will hear other aspects of what I am addressing, and you can share with one another what you may learn or acquire.

When one comes from another fellowship, usually Christian or Jewish, sometimes Reformed Hindu or Muslim in Africa, or simply secular or atheist, and we do have people from various groups, including even the Chinese family religions, if we want to call it that way.

And who knows what other backgrounds, there is a Zoroastrian who is in the church, whom I have known now for a number of years, if you don't know anything of that religion, that's the religion of old Persia before Islam.

The religion that was dominant in Persia in the days of Zerubbabel, for example.

Most Zoroastrians come from India, a competent group of business people.

When you come from the outside, you tend to shed certain things that you have in your background or retain them, depending on those circumstances.

When you grow up in the fellowship of the church, there is however another experience.

You discover that you in some way are associated culturally with the behavior of the church, and find that out in the world, religious or otherwise, there are attitudes toward what you may have.

A person who, for example, thought that Jesus Christ was born on December 25th, may have a shock and react to things pertaining to Christmas when he discovers that it is not provable.

It is an opinion.

Now if you're in the fellowship of the church, you may already have heard that it is not provable and an opinion, but the person who comes from the outside makes an association of all the other things pertaining to Christmas as an illustration, makes an association of those things with it.

And when he is persuaded, if he is or she is, those are set aside.

When you are in the fellowship of the church, you either may attach yourself firmly to the absence of Christian traditions, or you may react and wonder why you're being pointed out as one who doesn't follow Christmas traditions.

And so some children in the church grow up wishing they were like the world was, and some grow up knowing they're not like it is.

And so as we mature in the church, we may react to different things differently, and we may not even know exactly why the church thinks as it does.

So when Mr. Tkach read that letter that went out to the members and then in the worldwide news, in December he asked me what I thought of his first letter, and I said with respect to the old covenant comments and new covenant comments, especially the emphasis on the new covenant, I said the church should have understood that decades ago.

Now, let me explain something here.

The church is made up of people who had heard about the old and new covenant for decades.

I came from an outside environment, and some have grown up in the church fellowship.

There are some who in fact assumed certain things about the new covenant that I would never have assumed because I came from a different background.

And so Mr. Tkach is having to address for the church the peculiar situation that there are some people in the church who thought that they were really behaving in a manner that was proper for the new covenant, but were thinking in an old covenant mode.

And there were others who were not thinking in that mode.

Now let me illustrate that mode by a very important point.

Let us take, for example, the Sabbath as an illustration.

There are those who say, and it isn't a reference to being in the church or out of the church, but we'll just say there are those who would say this could be Adventist, Seventh-day Baptist, ourselves, Church of God, Seventh-day, so forth, Seventh-day Pentecostals, that you are required to keep the Sabbath.

Let's just say that that is something that is being said today and heard in written form, that there are those who say you're required to keep the Sabbath.

Now let's just use that statement.

There are people who thought they were required to keep the Sabbath, to be members of the church, and who voluntarily came to see that indeed they wanted to.

There are those who have grown up in our midst who were told that the Sabbath is a requirement and they did it without ever thinking whether they wanted to.

You decide where you fit.

There are those who did not assume that it was a voluntary matter, but if God says so, then I'll have to.

Now these are all problem approaches that we do need to address.

Let us take this, but it isn't the only one, but it's a simple one.

If you decide, as one man, not in this area that I have talked to, he said, well, would you say, speaking to me, that under the new covenant, the Sabbath is, shall we say, binding or more binding than it was under the old covenant? Well, I would say very simply, what do you mean by binding? Now too many people, when they hear a question, assume they have to answer it without asking another question.

It's wiser to know what people mean by these terms.

You know the story of the Jew who is criticized for always answering a question with a question.

He was asked, why do you do that? His answer was, why not? No, what do you mean by binding? Do you mean that I have to do it whether I want to or not? That couldn't be right, because if I have to do it, and my conscience doesn't lead me to realize I ought to, but I still do it anyway, I'm violating my conscience, and it certainly isn't being written in my heart and mind.

It may look like it because I am here, and I seem to be doing everything that we associate with the Sabbath.

Now what Mr. Tkach is trying to emphasize, and what the church may be saying, is that are not always clear.

I say that respectfully by way of the following example, and so we need to be patient.

Mr. Tkach has said tithing is voluntary.

Church literature indicates that tithing doesn't exist for the new covenant.

We are told that the annual days named in the Bible called holy days cannot be properly defined as holy days, because they're not holy unless you make them holy under the new covenant.

Yet our literature may say holy days and your holy day offering.

So I want you to think about the fact that there is no consistency in the implication.

We are not yet finished.

There is more unfinished business than the nature of God and the nature of angels and the nature of mind and the nature of the spirit and man.

There is the nature of language and how we use things.

So we need to be patient.

That's very important as the children of Israel learned in the wilderness.

Forty years teaches you a lot of patience.

And some of you haven't been here this long yet and have much more to learn.

And some of you have been here perhaps as long as that.

We still have to continue to learn and to understand patience.

But let me put it in these terms.

Mr. Tkach, and I'm speaking for him at this point and no other writer or speaker, he once it understood that if you are going to show respect to the Sabbath, that you do it out of willingness on your part, not because you have to.

That is what his concern is.

His concern is that if you give a tithe, that you should do it willingly not because you feel compelled.

There are also views in the church which says, which say that the Sabbath is not to be construed as holy or something to be kept today in terms of the new covenant.

Church administration says there will always be people among us who do think that we should keep the Sabbath holy.

The church has not said that there cannot be different points of view on this matter.

I will be very pleased then to encourage you to consider my perspective, not because you will be judged by it, but you may better understand some of the things being discussed if you realize that from my point of view, this was never an old covenant church.

And those who think it is, misunderstood what we taught.

And they did.

That's why some people are writing and thinking as if their thoughts were old covenant.

Now I'm not trying to explain what that might mean to different people.

For some people, the mere thought of tithing is old covenant, the mere thought of keeping the Sabbath holy is old covenant.

I will not answer that question for the moment because it's not the purpose of my being here today that I want you to consider.

The church has asked you over the years to behave in such a way that you, when you give tithes and offerings, you do so voluntarily, not because it's being bound on you.

And there were ministers who preached it is so binding that you have to whether you want to or not.

Now that can't be a new covenant message because if you don't want to, it isn't going to be written in your hearts and minds and then there couldn't be a new covenant practice.

I have observed the Sabbath and do keep it holy, listen carefully, not because the church is telling me today, but because I have always perceived once I learned about it before ever hearing of the Worldwide Church of God, I learned that I should do it voluntarily.

I learned about tithing.

Whether I learned it correctly or not, I examined what the church's literature is.

I chose to tithe voluntarily before I ever heard of the Worldwide Church of God.

When it came to the holy days, I had a shock because I had never heard of them before in the sense that you do.

I had heard of them as the Adventists write about it and I had to come to another decision.

As most of you would know from my name, I'm not Irish.

And we came from a time when the question of being Jewish was very important in the world's religions in Christianity in particular and anything that smacked of Judaism as they say was objectionable.

When I learned about what was in the Bible from the Worldwide Church of God then called the Radio Church of God corporately or just the Church of God, while at Ambassador College I faced the question, do I want to be a Jew inwardly? I wasn't baptized yet.

And I decided on two things with respect to baptism and by the way, baptism is also voluntary.

I don't know, by the way, of any minister who forced you under the water against your will.

Do you? If so, would you bring it to my attention? Decision is voluntary.

Christ may have something to ask you if you say to him, if it's voluntary, I couldn't care less.

But that will be for you to give an account.

But the point was this, I had to decide.

But if I made a decision, would I quit later? This was in 1947-48, just after World War II, when you know what it was like to make a decision and then be put in a concentration camp and be offered life or death.

I don't think that has, excuse me, the same meaning today in our society.

I decided, point one, that I was going to make the decision to make the decision to for baptism, voluntarily, excuse me, when I knew that I would be willing to give up my life and not to be baptized until I knew I would be willing to make that decision.

And the other was, as someone of German background, that I would be willing to be a Jew inwardly. Now, the argument that I shouldn't be a Jew inwardly or a Greek inwardly but a new man is to overlook that the Jews inherited the oracles of God and were given a way of life that no other people has had.

And we better not forget that.

The Greek philosophers were looking for wisdom and wisdom was in the Bible and that was in Hebrew.

But a Jew outwardly will never inherit the kingdom of God because eternal life was never promised by the letter of the law in the Old Testament.

It only gave you an outline of one, what God wanted his people to do and two, it defined sin, the errors both within the nation of Israel and the errors of the Gentiles.

But the Gentiles erred without the knowledge of the law and the Israelites erred with it.

So I had to recognize that when it came to the question of festivals, would I be willing to be a Jew inwardly? And I had to make that decision.

Just as I had earlier to make a decision before baptism, was I going to sit down in the Church of God with women who wore makeup? Would that be an issue? Because my mother did not.

She was born in the same year Mr. Armstrong and it was a different world.

I decided long before the issue became a controversy that the question of whether someone else wears it or not is not for me to give an account.

Now maybe if I had married somebody who wanted it, I might have to give an account why a letter spends so much money on it, but that's a separate matter.

That is not for me to decide.

Now whether the Church does or does not explain everything perfectly yet on any of the topics is not at the moment the issue.

I have pointed up that we do make statements that show we have not yet developed a vocabulary to define the situation.

But it is important that I tell you that I came here.

I first heard the program in 44, came to Ambassador College in 47, was baptized in 48, and let's say I think by Mr. Armstrong's testimony was converted in 49, you don't always become converted when you're baptized, especially when you have intellectual arguments.

But I have been around here a long time and I have seen ideas come and go.

And I have seen people come and go even while they were alive.

Now I've seen wonderful people go to their graves who are still with us.

That I'm not referring to.

And it is important that you catch the vision.

I came to a church that had more than one practice on makeup.

I am in the church today that has more than one view on a number of things.

The church is saying today correctly.

I feel right at home with this fly up here.

It's not one of these cities where everything is sanitized.

This is where life is real.

The church wants you to know that repentance is voluntary.

Now there are some societies that require repentance.

Would you like to have been in Albania in times past, or in the Soviet Union in times past, or may I offer you some other alternatives? Repentance is voluntary.

Repentance is required.

What do you mean by that? Do you mean repentance should precede baptism? The answer is yes.

And is baptism voluntary? The answer is yes.

I hope you're hearing carefully.

Did I say repentance is done away because it's voluntary? Or that baptism is done away because it's voluntary? But it is voluntary.

Whether you come to the services here is still voluntary even if you understand what the church is teaching today, which is point one, that we are commanded to assemble with one another, point two, that it is a tradition for us to do it on the Sabbath.

But you still are expected to be here voluntarily, and if it isn't voluntary and you feel compelled, you are not writing and letting the Spirit of God, or Jesus Christ, however you want to view the agency, writing it in you.

I have been attending church voluntarily for 47 years and a half.

I've been attending it voluntarily.

It has become, let's say, a way of life.

And I learned also that I learned things I had never seen before in the Bible by taking note of the annual festivals that God gave to the children of Israel as distinct from what the Romans and the Greeks and all the other nations Egyptians had in the Middle East.

I learned things from those festivals because I observed them voluntarily with the church.

And I'm astonished that I am right when I say that people who never observed the Sabbath have never understood some things about the Sabbath and about what it means.

And people who have never observed the holy days, as the church had called them and sometimes still does, or the festivals of God who had, in fact, mediated them, have never fully understood what they could mean.

Now, if the church learned this much and by our experience learned significantly that Jesus Christ came to die and that we have to wrestle with human nature and not let sin dominate us and Christ's sacrifice where we lose a wrestling match pays for sins that we commit, that we cannot wrestle without the Spirit of God.

And that, indeed, the Christian life and the life of the church will culminate with the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection will lead to a world that is quite different from our world today, of which the prophets give witness.

The degree to which I forget what those days mean by not being in voluntary attendance is the degree to which darkness begins to descend on one.

When I decide it doesn't matter one way or another what the church is saying is its tradition.

When I read how little is known today of what God will do when Jesus Christ returns, I realize there are people whose heart has never understood what those festivals should have meant that focused on harvesting, that focused on a sacrifice, that focused on in-gathering, that understood that indeed the whole world has lain in darkness and much of the world has never understood a message, all of those things we learned by being present on Sabbath days and festivals.

If people were attending the Sabbath and festivals and tithing and eating clean foods, because the church compelled them, because they thought the church required it for you to be a member, those people's Sabbath-keeping presence on the festivals, avoiding certain foods, that means nothing because they weren't internalizing anything.

You can be here if you don't really want to, but feel compelled to or bound to.

Mr. Armstrong in the first volume of the autobiography made it quite clear to his younger daughter when she once said, I don't want to go to church today, and he said, well, we understand, I don't want to be compelled to, but he said, you've never been, you voluntarily come, and if you want to stay home, that is your decision.

But we'll be leaving shortly, and we'll come back, and there are things, of course, that you'll be here alone and can do, and when she realized she was going to be alone, she volunteered to go.

I hope you haven't forgotten that story.

The argument over whether it's required or voluntary is a false argument, because if it is voluntary, look what happens, there are people who say, if it's voluntary, I won't do it, and I've had people tell me that.

If I were to say to a certain person, someone who's been in the church, that baptism is voluntary, that person would say, that's not true, it's required.

And I would say, in turn, do you mean that baptism has merit, if you feel it's required, and do it, and don't choose to do it voluntarily? You see, some people assume if it's voluntary, there is no reason for it.

They assume that if it's required, I should do it whether I like to or not.

And neither of those are valid explanations of the words voluntary or required.

A new covenant is a relationship in which God seeks to live his life through the Holy Spirit in the presence of Jesus Christ in us.

And it is all voluntary, which means, listen carefully, that you have lots of things to think about and learn to do.

Not because it's voluntary, I won't pay any attention to all the things that are described in the Bible.

Now, when we have people in the church, today, after some of our friends leave the fellowship of the church, we discover that we are not all yet in the unity of the faith.

I discovered that it is important, more important than to understand the particular thing, to know how, listen carefully, to deal with that, and how to deal with our interrelationships with another.

There are people who understand an argument, there are people who understand a doctrine, and as far as they're concerned, it is an argument and a doctrine.

It may mean something strictly intellectual that you don't do anything about, or it may mean something you do, and so some people feel that they are righteous for doing it.

But that is the wrong motive.

One should do that which pleases God, and one should examine the Scripture, and one should learn how we go about interrelating to one another.

I told the lady from this other area, who felt somewhat alone, I said, look, this is not the time to engage in discussions verbally when a church is sensitized.

What you should do is invite people to communicate with you, and step up and communicate with others who may even have, from your own point of view, a different perspective.

You will find, if you do, there are people that you can communicate with freely.

There are people whom you cannot communicate with as freely.

I find I can discuss things of a religious nature with people of various religions.

My life and I have Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant friends, not to separate the last two, but there are reasons, because sometimes we focus on Protestantism, and that is only a part of a greater whole.

We have people of different backgrounds that we can communicate with, and share many things with, how much more should we be able to share with the Spirit of God in us? So we need to learn to be patient, not to bring up irritating questions, and know when to be able to give an answer as to why you do certain things.

If I meet somebody, and I do, my wife does, we have Catholic friends who eat foods that we don't, we have Jewish friends, I'll never forget an interesting story, Sui An Kori, a Byzantine Jewish scholar, that is of the later Roman Empire, I invited him out to an evening meal, he was a reformed Jew, and we went to a Chinese restaurant where it was possible to get lamb, and he ordered some other things, typical of Chinese cuisine, from the sea, and he made his first order, and then the man with me and I, when we all had placed our order, and two of us, I'm not sure if our wives were there at

that time, we had asked for lamb, and the waiter was taking the request away, and our Jewish friend Sui An Kori, he said, wait a moment, make mine lamb too! He thought about it, it didn't trouble me, whether he did or did not, I am not his judge, but I will have to give an account to God, and I want to be able to give an account so clear, that there will be nothing that I have overlooked in old or new testament.

When an explanation is incomplete, I complete the explanation and arrive at a conclusion, because not every verse in the Bible can be examined in a logical presentation or in a sermon, but you need to see all that is said, and you need to know why it is said, and how you would account for that in the judgment.

But I can still be friends, and I can sit here, according to contemporary church tradition, and understand if you do not fast on the day of atonement, and I do.

You will offer your explanation, and I will offer mine, in the judgment.

But I am the kind of person who likes to engage in what Luther, Martin Luther, called Tish-Late, or Table Talk.

My wife and I might call it Pillow Talk, I don't know how you get along with your wife, or your husband, but at Table Talk we discuss things that do not determine the fate of the world.

That is, we discuss things on which we might differ, or for which there could be no precise statement.

So I have no problem with discussing where I would have a difference.

That is why I can discuss things with people of other faith, all together.

And I can culturally understand and appreciate without sitting in judgment.

So I learn, over time, not to touch sensitive issues, to touch issues that another person would enjoy discussing.

I know that there are people who don't like to discuss differences, and Americans are like that.

The pastors who were here probably heard me tell a story of a Greek restaurateur, they will remember it, so they'll pardon my addressing it.

A Greek restaurateur coming to this country was shocked by an American characteristic, which is characteristic of many people in the Church of God, because we are living in America.

But when you meet someone and chance to socialize with the person and discover that that person is a Republican, not a Democrat, or a Baptist, and not an Episcopalian, that may be the last time you have any special social relationship.

That is, if there is no real agreement politically or religiously, whatever the main area of your life is, or in other customs, there is no real continuation of friendship.

Now, the Greeks, in general, are different.

If all your friends agree with you, there is nothing to argue over.

But if you meet a person in Greece who differs from your opinion, you want to have another dinner with him, because there is more to discuss.

And it's a difference in personality.

So I'd like to suggest that you examine your own traits here.

You examine your own traits of how you react.

Can you feel comfortable making somebody else comfortable who has different views than you do, without it either troubling you or him? Now, I know a person who's a humanist.

There used to be a minister in this church.

And I remember spending one hour in his office, and we agreed shortly before he was leaving the church fellowship, we agreed that neither of us agreed on anything.

And we parted friends, and I would be pleased to introduce him here, not for a sermon, but to introduce him here, because he's one of the most cordial conversationalists who would be willing to tell you why he thinks what he does as a humanist, and why I think what I do.

And I would tell you, look, if you want to learn about such and such a topic, I would tell you, ask him.

He will tell you the other side in a way that maybe I'd have to ask him, see, just like he would ask me.

And we can part as friends.

But then once in a while you meet somebody that after the first sentence or two you realize this is going nowhere, and there are going to be emotional problems if I discuss this topic anymore.

And that can happen.

I had that happen with a very fine Irish Catholic friend, and I learned that if I don't address the problem of the IRA, we can be the finest friends.

But I must not address that question.

That is super sensitive.

So learn to understand your sensitivities in terms of how you react.

Learn to understand other sensitivities.

Discuss in private what is appropriately private.

Discuss in public what is appropriate for those around so that there is no attempt, let's say, to cause division if somebody wants me.

Let's put it this way.

There was a time that I happened to have disagreed on a fundamental concept with Mr. Armstrong.

On the subject of reproduction, it was a physical, biological, geological question, the subject of reproduction before Adam.

It's something that I would not discuss from the pulpit and would not discuss normally in an area where there were others, as long as Mr. Armstrong had the opinion that he did.

Now when I was in the woods at the Girl Scouts camp, high up above Pasadena, and everyone asked me to discuss the question, I did.

And I did it in the following way.

I went through how Mr. Armstrong arrived at his conclusion.

Because I knew how he had arrived, he had explained it to me.

And I explained how I arrived at mine.

And you know what? Those who listened made their own decisions.

I didn't say that you have to make a choice.

They've made their decisions.

It is wrong to think we must shield our children from other ideas than those that we hold to be true.

I would be foolish to shield myself from other ideas that I do not hold until I have examined them.

One minister has said the church in times past taught us to be closed-minded, because we said guard the door of your mind.

My answer to that right away is that person didn't understand what it meant to be on guard duty.

To guard the door of your mind does not mean to shut it and never open it.

It means to know what new information that is valid you should let in, and to examine all information before you let it in, to lodge there.

There was a minister who left some time ago from the fellowship of the church.

She asked me what would you do if you were in my place? He laid out what he intended to do.

I said I wouldn't even let myself think those thoughts.

I would not let it by the door to my mind, speaking symbolically.

Because as soon as you let it in you begin to entertain it, and I could see that it would lead to nothing but division.

And so we have a competitive work as a result, which is not an alternative.

Or did I explain what that group is? No, I didn't, but if you understand you wouldn't have any major problems.

Knowing how serious I would take that.

The church today is made up of people who grow in understanding.

It is made up of people who have to live their lives with others, some of whom have brought ideas from the outside, some of whom have grown up in the church, and sometimes we grow up in the church regretting things we didn't experience, and sometimes we grow up in the church outside of the church regretting things we did experience.

I am simply pleased to have ceased participating in blood sausage and pork fat.

Blutwurst, for some of you who know the German-Polish customs.

Now I don't have any doubt that having eaten them without lust is the real issue.

To lust is thin, without any question.

The Tenth Commandment speaks about lust, and I will tell you how you should look at the commandments in an afternoon sermon, but the others who will be assembling here.

But I look at the scripture, and I look at myself, and I realize that there are some of you who have never experienced this.

You never internalized any issue over blood sausage and chunks of pork fat, and I will use that as an illustration for a reason.

Because I had to ask myself, is that the will of God? Is this something that German-Polish culture or Slovakian or Czech culture should indulge in? Because I'm not only pursuing the way of salvation, I'm learning to live a way of life.

And interestingly, I discover in the Bible perhaps the least commandment.

I don't know if you know what the least one is.

Jesus didn't say, but he said, that you could find the least one.

Let me just turn to a certain verse.

The last verse of Leviticus chapter 3, verse 17.

We are asked to eat neither fat nor blood.

Leviticus 3, 17, the only place where not eating fat is addressed.

The question of blood is addressed in Acts 15.

But I would take the question of eating fat as probably the least commandment written in the Bible.

It's only mentioned once, and it just pertains to something physical.

But before I write this off and say, just because it is in the book of Leviticus, I want nothing to do with it, I could care less whether it is written there or not.

And if it isn't in the New Testament, I will just do what I please.

Let me tell you, I wouldn't want to use those excuses in the judgment.

I am to live by every word of God, and you do, but I must make the decision voluntary.

I do not treat this as a commandment for which I am compelled to do it against my will.

Because in reality, we have misunderstood the word law.

We forgot that in the Hebrew, its fundamental use is divine or fatherly instruction, not the legality that you see it in the form because the word also came to be used like we think of as just legislation in the letter.

So I look at this in the spirit.

Now, you can't avoid all fat that is animal fat.

We're not talking of butter fat.

We're talking of the fat of animals.

So it isn't a question that I weigh it by the fragment of an ounce or a gram.

That's nonsense.

But I look at this and ask myself this least commandment, shall I be careless or shall I look at the implication of this? And then I read what medical science is beginning to learn.

And I am free to talk this over with you here because I haven't told you anything but what you will have to freely decide yourself.

And Mr. Tkach wants you to freely decide.

And he wants you to look at the Bible.

And he has in fact loosened the perspective more than many of you would like.

That is a prerogative that anyone in his office can exercise, whether it is perfectly exercised or not.

There's some who would go further.

For Mr. Tkach has said that tithing is voluntary.

And yet the teaching goes further than that.

I hope that this will at least get you started in knowing how to communicate with each other, to have the sense that you can sit here with me because I want you to know that I have opinions but you're not going to be judged by any of them.

And it is more important for you to know, not where I stand, but the...