

In-N-Out Burger and the Seventh-day Adventist Church

By Jamey Houghton

Once again, there is talk in my denomination about a potential split, and once again it has to do with women's ordination.

Ever since the article published by Spectrum Magazine came out, the internet has been ablaze with strong opinions. I have heard it all again, and again with fairly influential pastors suggesting that it's time to withhold tithe and send our GC leadership a message.

One thing I have noticed is that seemingly good Christian folks feel free to leave their Christianity at the desk when commenting on religious topics online. Don't agree with what I'm saying? I'll call you the pope and accuse you of being a dictator.

Acting like a pope is what many have accused our General Conference President of this last week. However, that seems to be the last internet resort of responding to someone with whom you disagree.

But you know what? I have learned something very valuable from Ted Wilson. As with most of us, we were diving into the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to find out what we should do about women's ordination in San Antonio. I had read all the books and articles, sprinkled with some poorly done YouTube videos. After reading everything, I came to my own conclusion. My conclusion and conviction was not the same conclusion and conviction that Ted Wilson came to in his studies.

I was struggling with what to do if the vote went opposite of my conclusions, and this is where Ted Wilson helped me. Pastor Wilson publicly stated that despite his conclusion in his studies, he would support the vote of the church. What he was saying was that he would trust that God would lead his church and would have supported women's ordination had the church voted to do so. That really made me think. He was trusting that God could lead his church, and even if he didn't understand the vote, he was willing to support a decision he had formally been against. That takes some humility. With all of the internet bashing he took, he was the only person I saw—the only person-- that entrusted his decision entirely to God.

After reading his statement, I was inspired to trust God in whatever direction He led our church. Because really, the God who parted the Red Sea, the God that knows the end from the beginning, the God that sent fire from heaven in response to Elijah's prayer is most definitely capable of leading and guiding His church through rough waters.

The vote happened, I was surprised and disappointed, but resolved to trust that somehow God was leading his church even though I didn't quite understand why things didn't turn out like I thought they should. Looking back in the Bible, did every person always understand what God was up to? Not really.

So here we are a year later. There are unions that are not abiding by the guidelines of the world church. What do we do with this? If we ignore it, that makes the vote in San Antonio completely worthless.

If the vote had gone the other way and ordination of women had been approved—and there were conferences or unions that stated that no matter the vote, they would not ordain women, I'm sure there would be howling and all kinds of protest. Yet somehow it is being rationalized that it is ok to be out of harmony with church policy because the vote went the other way. If we follow this path that despite church votes we ignore and do our own thing, what happens?

Well, for starters, women's ordination won't be the only thing that some churches and conferences will be out of policy on. The slippery slope is that pretty much anything will go. The GC says LGBTQ's can't be members? No problem, they didn't require the adherence of policy regarding women's ordination. Now that they are members, they are eligible to be elders and clergy. But not to worry, the GC didn't require adherence to the women's ordination vote, so they won't require adherence to this either. Don't agree with the literal six day creation? No problem, go ahead and teach theistic evolution, nobody is going to do anything about it. Don't believe in a literal flood? Not a problem. When everyone does what they want despite our denominational guidelines and beliefs, our denomination ceases to exist. It turns out that this is much bigger than just women's ordination.

I, for one, love the Seventh-day Adventist church. The reason I am a part of this movement is because I agree with the teachings and believe it is God's remnant church. I don't believe there is more light out there somewhere else, this is it. That's not meant to be arrogant, but those are my convictions. If you don't believe that, you're in the wrong church. When I prepare someone for baptism, we go through everything that the church teaches so they know what they are joining. As per church guidelines and common sense, if someone believes everything our church teaches except, say, the state of the dead, I wouldn't baptize them or allow them to formally join my church. Why? It doesn't make any sense for them to join a group of believers when they don't believe the same thing.

Recently there has been an online petition for the restaurant chain In-N-Out Burger to serve a vegetarian burger. In-N-Out has a huge cult following on the west coast. People LOVE this place. If a friend of yours is there, more than likely you're going to see a picture of their food on your social media. But in this big petition a large backlash came about from those who don't want a vegetarian option served. As someone that would love a vegetarian option there, I was torn. You see, a large number of people were vehement that there shouldn't be a change. In-N-Out was special because of who it was and what it served. There shouldn't be pressure to change it. They said, 'If you want vegetarian food, go somewhere else—don't ruin our restaurant.' Another person said, 'No one is going to vegetarian restaurants and signing petitions that they start serving meat there.' He had a point. The restaurant is unique because of what it has and changing it might cause the faithful diners to feel like it has been ruined.

I don't want my church ruined, and potential doctrinal change would ruin it. This week at Annual Council isn't just about women's ordination, it's about the uniqueness of our church and its teachings. Sure, I would have liked to have seen a different outcome to last summers vote, but I

don't think it's good leadership to allow our church to become congregational where each area does something different. Where does that end? It opens up the possibility of actual doctrinal teachings being taught in our institutions on a large scale that are not parallel to our church beliefs. To an extent this is already happening. How long do we allow leaders in our church to deviate from Seventh-day Adventist teachings and doctrine before something is done to require adherence to our unique beliefs? I listened to a sermon at an Adventist higher educational institution where the pastor openly promoted the gay lifestyle as acceptable and even biblical! To my knowledge, this individual is still a pastor in our denomination even though he doesn't agree with the stance of the church he works for. If someone, especially clergy, doesn't agree with the denominational teachings, then they are not being honest with themselves by staying a part of that denomination. As a church member, I expect my church to maintain doctrinal integrity so that when my kids are college age, I can trust that my kids will be taught bible truth as they attend Seventh-day Adventist schools.

This seems to be less about women's ordination and more about protecting the uniqueness of our denomination. If our leadership looks the other way as whole unions deviate from world church policy, they do a disservice to God's work. If you think withholding God's tithe is a great option for a protest, you are not helping but hindering the work that could be going on around the world. God's work.

Instead of ripping our GC President to shreds in comment sections and online forums, maybe you should consider following his lead and humbly ask God to lead our church in whatever direction He sees is best. You see, humility is one of the biggest attributes that we can emulate as we reflect Jesus. Having a defiant attitude is anything but the reflection of Jesus. Humility is something I have really had to work on.

As this weekend approaches, please take some time in prayer and ask God to humble our hearts and inspire the minds of our leaders. Now is not the time to be combative, but the time to finish God's work. There are people yearning for hope while we bicker and fight online. There are people who need to know Jesus, and we are fragmenting the church that God brought together. Our job is to be in one accord and ask for the Holy Spirit to use us to show Jesus to the world. Let's finish the work! Not my will, but Yours be done.