

## Chapter 35

# William E (Part II)

[On August 15, 1911, Elder C. F. McVagh, president of the Southern Union Conference, wrote W. C. White:

“Dear Brother: in Alabama the Conference officers are much perplexed about the case of William E, and I have been asked to write for a copy of what has been written [by Ellen White] bearing upon his public labor as a minister, and also for present advice, or instruction from the Lord. You are acquainted with his past. His life has been straight so far as is known for several years, and he has sold books and Bibles. But he feels a burden to preach and wherever he goes he soon has opportunity to preach. He has wonderful ability and soon there is an interest. He gives outward evidence of deep consecration and people accept the truth under his labors.

“A little over a year ago he moved to Birmingham, Alabama, and soon was taking an active part in church work. The church at that time was very much run down. He became elder, and soon had some work started and several families interested. The interest grew and during the winter he held Sunday night meetings in a theater with a large attendance, and some accepted the truth. He had the confidence of the church members who were naturally much encouraged, and so, as he had to devote much of his time to taking care of the interest (he is an indefatigable worker), the Conference Committee voted him \$8 a week to assist him. Of course he cannot live on that, and he thinks the interest demands full time, and he is really looking to the restoration of his credentials and complete recognition as a minister of the Conference. His present experience no one doubts, but the past has marked him and his family.

“His wife is a nervous wreck and her confidence has been so shaken that while she wants him to preach, there is constant danger that as he becomes popular and mingles with the people that

she will become jealous, whether [there] is any cause or not, and herself bring on a scandal by talking and telling of the past which she is prone to do when she becomes suspicious of him. All would be greatly relieved if there is any definite counsel from the Lord. I feel sure that all would accept it, including Brother and Sister E.

“Personally, I feel very sorry for them both and have confidence that they are trying to live right, and I wish to encourage them in every way that is right. His past is so checkered and so widely known that we fear to advise him to labor in the ministry, but the fact is he is doing it, and the Lord apparently blesses his efforts. Shall we advise him to quit preaching, or shall the Conference accept his labor and pay him for it? If he labors he must be paid and then what about his credentials?

Sincerely

(Signed) C. F. McVagh

“Written at the request of the Alabama

Conference Committee.”

On September 14, Elder White placed this letter in Mrs. White’s hands, and on September 15, Elder White conveyed Mrs. White’s counsel in the case to Elder McVagh. W. C. White’s letter is as follows:

“Dear Brother McVagh: It is two or three weeks since I received your letter of August 15, regarding the perplexity which has arisen in the Alabama Conference over the case of William E.

“Since our return from Southern California, Mother has been weak and weary, and I did not place this letter in her hands until yesterday. Then she read it all through, and when she recalled the sad experiences through which Brother E has passed, she felt very sorry for him and for our brethren whose hearts have been made sad through the past years by his weak and wicked course.

“Mother says that those who have dealt with the perplexities arising from his many

transgressions in the past should take the responsibility of advising regarding our present duty toward him. Mother does not wish to take large responsibility in this matter, but she says regarding Elder E as she has said regarding other men in a somewhat similar position, if they have thoroughly repented, if they are living such lives as convince their brethren that they are thoroughly in earnest, do not cut them off from fellowship, do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility.

“From this I would understand that it would be unwise to renew his credentials and send him from place to place among the people, but if he has by a faithful Christian life won the confidence of the church where he lives, do not stand in the way of his doing such work as that church may be responsible for. In fact, it may be the duty of his brethren to go farther and to pay him for faithful labor. In fact, I do not see how you could withhold from him a proper remuneration for faithful and judicious labor. But this would not be placing

before him the same temptation as to give him credentials and send him forth in the Conference as a traveling minister.

“Again I would say, as Mother has said, this is a question which should be submitted to those who have had to deal with his case in the past. Please consider the opinions I have expressed only as suggestive.”

At the close of this letter Ellen White personally inscribed the following words of endorsement: “This is correct advice in such cases. Let him walk humbly before God. I see no light in giving him responsibilities.”

No more was heard of the matter until early in 1913, when a letter addressed to Mrs. White, dated January 8, 1913, was received from A. L. Miller, the newly-elected president of the Alabama Conference. He wrote:

“Dear Sister White: It becomes my painful duty to write to you concerning the case of Brother

William E. Of his past history and life, it is not necessary to write, as you are sufficiently acquainted with the facts, since his case was brought before you by a letter from Elder C. F. McVagh, dated August 15, 1911. I am sorry it becomes necessary to bring this case before you again.

“Elder McVagh’s letter was relative to Brother E receiving credentials and becoming a Conference laborer.

“The present difficulty is as to whether or not Brother E should be made elder of the Birmingham church, the largest, and now the most influential church in the Conference, as the Conference headquarters are located in Birmingham. The church is disagreed upon the point in question, and it is having a bad influence upon the work in the city and a more or less deleterious effect throughout the Conference. The majority think, because of his capabilities and his late work in the city (as stated in Elder McVagh’s letter, a copy of which is herein enclosed), that he should be made

elder of the church and act as its pastor, or leader, while others do not favor it because of his life record, and also think that those who have dealt with him in the past should give counsel, and advise as to his becoming elder of the church.

“The counsel given by brethren acquainted with him, and by a recent action of the Southern Union Conference Committee, is that he be not made elder of the church.

“On December 28, Elder S. E. Wight [new president of the Southern Union Conference] held a meeting with the church, at which the question was quite freely discussed. Elder Wight dealt very carefully and cautiously with the case and spoke of Brother E’s good traits and qualifications, but let the church know that neither he nor I could feel free to ordain him because of the advice given by those who know him.

“The only point upon which we all could agree was to place his case before the servant of the Lord, and whatever the Lord says, we have all



agreed to stand by.

“Personally, none of us have aught to say against Brother E, but love and fellowship him as a brother in the church and so regard him. The church, with Elder Wight as chairman, asked that I place this matter before you and see what instruction the Lord has for us.

“Awaiting an early reply, I am  
sincerely your brother in Christ,  
(Signed) A. L. Miller

1700 North Seventh Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama

“P. S. This letter was read to the church, and accepted.”

Feeling that his personal appearance before Mrs. White might gain favorable consideration of his case, Brother E went to St. Helena during the second week in January, but Sister White did not feel free to have an interview with him. He then

placed in writing the circumstances of his case, which were addressed to Sister White under date of January 13, 1913. On January 14, Elder Miller's letter of January 8, as well as Brother E's letter of January 13, were placed before Sister White. She made the following statements in connection with their reading:]

I do not think any such questions as that ought to be placed before me. I do not think it is my work to deal with any such things unless the case has been plainly opened before me. There should be brethren in the church who have wisdom who can speak decidedly regarding this case. I cannot understand such things. I do not believe that God wants me to take any such burden upon me. If they cannot settle such things among themselves by prayer and fasting, then let them continue [in] fasting and prayer till they can.

Such things will arise. It will come—that is, they will have these difficult questions, and they have got to learn how to treat them. They have got to have an experience. They must bring these

things to the Lord, and believe the Lord will hear their prayer, and give them a sound experience in all these things, but they are not to bring them to me.

[Elder W. C. White read portions of Elder McVagh's letter of August 15, 1911, after which Sister White said further:]

I have had no particular light in regard to his case, therefore I dare not speak positively in regard to it.

He has to show the evidence that God accepts him and to give that evidence so that our brethren can have something tangible to build upon. Let them say, We will give you a chance. We will see whether God accepts your labors or not.

But it is not wise for me to take the responsibility of this case. I cannot take the least responsibility. Those who see his actions day by day should know whether he has proved himself, whether God accepts him.

[After reading the letter of William E, written January 13, 1913, Ellen White said:]

I cannot take responsibility in such matters. The burden of doing so is too great. It might cost me my life. Let those appointed of God to bear the responsibility deal with it in accordance with Christian principles.—Ms 2, 1913.

[In connection with the question as to what was involved in his statement of September 15, 1911, relative to the holding of responsible positions by those who have passed through such sad experiences, Elder W. C. White, early in 1913, wrote as follows:

“It now appears that there is a question in the minds of the brethren as to what was meant by the words, ‘Do not cut them off from fellowship; do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility.’

“My understanding of this at the time it was written and my understanding of it today is that the words, ‘Do not elevate them to positions of responsibility’ referred to such responsibility and elevation as was in the minds of the brethren when they asked for a restoration of credentials and complete recognition as a minister of the Conference. It did not occur to me that this could apply to the leadership of the church. The question of the leadership was not then under consideration.”]