

c/o P.O. Box 488
Newport, OR 97365
Feb. 11, 1991

Dear Sydney,

The enclosed letter was sent to me from Threshingfloor Ministries; apparently my relatives have put me on their mailing list. With it was a copy of the "Dear Alaska Friends" letter signed by Harold, Eldon, Ernest and Howard. I thought you might want to be aware of what many in your state likely will be receiving.

Altho Threshingfloor's motive is to harm us, but the motive of the lady whose letter is quoted seems to be to get help she couldn't get from us, and I have to admit that her complaints are legitimate. She voices a concern that I have been praying about for some months: Bluntly put, are we concealing unrepented sin? Are we accepting in our fellowship men who have neither forsaken their sin nor gotten a revelation of true doctrine?

If our enemies are critical because Truitt is in gospel meetings, what will they say when they find he is going to fellowship meetings, taking the emblems of Christ's broken body when he does not believe Jesus was human, and taking part in meetings with the friends expected to say amen?

Would you bear with me while I express some of my concerns? It is better than talking amongst ourselves and getting stirred up. I was so grateful for the decision made at in Aurora. These things take a lot of courage. The official word given concerned Bob's immorality and Truitt's doctrine. It sounded to me then, that the problems had been completely addressed and fully dealt with. I felt so relieved.

Then I heard that Bob's problem is also doctrine, and Truitt's problem is also immorality, and that both men's problems are much graver than has been publicly admitted. I find it so distressing that we have not been fully warned. Sex crimes are terrible beyond words, but how much worse seduction of the soul? I want to be able to believe that our older brothers will protect us from these terrors.

I had some close dealings for a period of time with a woman who was teaching false doctrine. The thing that confused me most was not her teachings, but the fact that the other workers were accepting her as a fellowminister in good standing, even tho they knew. The result was that I became very fearful and distrustful of all workers. If they accepted this woman with her doctrine, they must not be right either. And if they weren't right, who could I trust? It was very scary.

Her false doctrine had a certain hold on me even tho I resisted it. The reason it had power over me was because other workers who knew were silent. Several months went by, and one day I got exercised about it and put it all down on paper. I showed it to one of the sisters, and she said, "This is deadly poison." That's what finally broke the spell for me, when someone finally said, out loud, "This is wrong, this is false, this is dangerous." It was the covered wrong, the secret wrong that nobody will talk about, that feels most devastating.

In my own experience in two fields where there were molestation cases, I have learned:

The offender did not fully acknowledge his wrong until he was in the hands of the law.

The victim was not able to begin healing until it had been publicly acknowledged through proper legal channels to have committed a crime against her. That the behavior had ceased was not enough. In the one case, several months passed from the time the behavior ceased to the time the victim reported the crime. It was only after the crime was reported that she had access to the counselling and support she so badly needed to rise above it all. I might mention also that the offender himself expressed relief when the matter was finally settled in court.

The friends in the field did not settle down until we had visited in each home, brought the unpleasant matter out in the open, stated out loud that the problem was of a sexual nature. (Euphemisms were not adequate.) We stated a few facts to counteract imagination and/or rumors, and then gave them a chance to vent their feelings and bring up any concerns. Most of them were first extremely angry, but later supportive of us and of the family. The friends who had more difficulty were the ones who already had hidden, unresolved problems of their own.

I was dubious about the wisdom of tackling these visits. It felt like tattling, and I worried it might stir up unnecessary trouble. Actually, we discovered it to be a great relief to have things out in the open. For instance, we had some very upset parents of small children asking, "If you knew about this why didn't you warn us earlier?" We had no answer, except that we had been naive. Also, when one family knew and they would be talking to another family, and they were wondering, "Do they know?" and "If they know, do they that we know?" This made for a strong undercurrent of tension that popped like a bubble when everyone knew the facts, and everyone knew that everyone else knew. Here I might add that the facts we gave them had already been established in court.

We also let each family know that they were free to talk directly to us or to the family involved if they had further questions. Then we made good on our promise to listen to and answer them. Actually, there were not many who needed to talk further; for most it was settled for them with one visit.

In the second case, the offender had an unblemished reputation. We all reacted with "But he would never do a thing like that," and concluded it must be a false accusation. We just couldn't believe it. But we had to believe it when confronted by the fact that he had pled guilty. There could have easily been sidetaking in the church. But when someone said "He wouldn't do that", we could simply answer, "He pled guilty. He's been sentenced." This kept us workers out of the position of having to judge or take sides. His guilt had already been established. We were simply supporting the laws of the land. There was no problem if people felt the sentence was too strict or too lenient; the judge had decided that matter. No problem with differing opinions about what kind of counselling should be given the family members; that was decided by the authorities. No problem with getting him to follow through with treatment; he had to or be found in contempt of court.

Meanwhile, the man is saying to himself, "But I'd surely never do a thing like that." Very difficult for him to admit to himself even, that he'd really done it. As hard for him to believe as it was for us. But having to face the legal consequences helped him to face the reality of what he had done. (When the police knocked at the door with arrest warrant and handcuffs, it got pretty real.) That was the first step towards repentance. The court-ordered treatment that followed established the seriousness of what he had done and offered him a positive course of action. When the friends saw that he was sincerely working with the treatment program, they were wonderfully supportive.

The program also guided him in the steps of making amends. One step was writing a letter of apology, and later an oral apology. He was required to state exactly and completely what he did; a partial or general apology was not acceptable. He stated that what he did was wrong, and that he was sorry. He was not allowed to ask her to forgive him. That was her decision; his responsibility was to simply apologize. The responsibility for making things right was on him, and asking her to forgive him was putting some responsibility over onto her, and that was not his right to do. The whole problem started with asking her to do things he had no right to ask, and the counsellors were trying to help him break that pattern. It seems that addicts often feel that if they can get the victim to forgive, it will make things all right, and then the addict doesn't have to change.

The treatment also taught the offender how to deal with the terrible overpowering shame he felt once his denial was broken down. This man's wife told us that his shame was incapacitating, and his counsellors spent weeks trying to help him to deal with it and go on. Without their specialized help, she felt he would not have been able to recover himself.

His counsellors also taught him that every day for the rest of his life he must remind himself, "I am a sex offender. I have the potential to hurt someone, and I must watch myself because this could happen again." They said that any time he begins to believe he will not do it again, he is likely to repeat the crime.

According to the little brochure we picked up at the police station, any professional, which includes teachers, counsellors, medical personnel, and ministers, who becomes aware of a case of child abuse or molestation, is required by law to report it. That's a legal obligation. As for our moral obligation, I personally feel that it parallels the duty of a citizen who knows about a murder. We do wrong if we keep quiet. We aid the criminal if we keep quiet.

I was going to say I have no close ties with the people in Alaska or Montana, so have no personal stake in the matter. But that's not true. I do: my own peace of mind. I want to feel that I am safe when I travel with brothers (assuming I behave myself.) I want to feel safe at any convention: physically and doctrinally. I want to be able to have confidence that if I am in potential danger from any worker or ex-worker, that I will be warned. I need assurance that when we make special meeting plans, we can place workers in the homes of our people and feel confident that their doctrine and behavior will be godly. When I give our friends addresses for meetings in another state, I want to know that they will be safe there. I feel just as terrified of being seduced by false doctrine as I am of falling into the hands of a sex offender. As you older brothers deal with this matter, you are in my prayers. Thank you for taking time to consider the fears I feel as a woman and as a young worker.

BY: Selma Lundin, Sister Worker