

Union Membership

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

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Ephesians 6:5 *“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ...”*

A young man stops by to chat with his minister. He has finished his schooling; now he goes forth to find a job. Several places where he would like to work require membership in the union. What is he to do? Good jobs are hard to come by. What objections does the church have against union membership?

That young man's situation is not unique. Today, and repeatedly, one faces the alternative of submitting to the union or losing one's job. That problem especially faces the Christian youth. What must he do?

Our churches are opposed to union membership—in fact we regard this as incompatible with church membership. Why? We ought to understand what our objections really are. We do NOT object to union membership because we are opposed to organizations of employees. It is not wrong to belong to organizations; nor is it wrong to have an employees' organization or union. We do NOT object to union membership because they, en masse, would quit their jobs if higher wages were not paid. Nor do we object that workers may not seek fair wages and proper working conditions. We do NOT object to union membership because we favor employers or countenance any of their selfish or evil practices.

I would suggest for your consideration several reasons why we believe that union membership and church membership are incompatible.

First, unions, as these operate in our land, force its members to walk in violation of the fifth commandment. The fifth commandment requires proper obedience to those in authority. An employee voluntarily places himself under the authority of the employer for a specified time for specified wages. Under these arrangements, the employee has the right to quit—even in conjunction with other employees. But the union seeks to dictate to the employer what shall be the conditions of employment—and if necessary will use force to compel the employer to submit to the demands. Children may reason with parents. Citizens may make overtures to government. Employees may make requests of employers. But in no instance may those under authority use force to compel those in authority to bow before their demands. To do so is to walk in violation of the fifth commandment. The union uses the strike as a club to compel the employer to submit. Its membership, therefore, violates the fifth commandment.

Secondly, unions, as these operate within our land, walk in violation of the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” By means of the strike, the union is in the position in which it can shut down the factories of the employer. The union members themselves will not work—but also, they will not allow others to work in their place. These take effective control over the possessions of another. They will cause the employer to go bankrupt, or at least will cause him to lose considerable income—unless and until he submits to the demands made by the union. This is stealing that which belongs to another. The union may no more use the strike with its threat of physical or material harm to take what it desires from another, than I can use the gun with its threat of physical or material harm to take something from another. This is a violation of the eighth commandment.

Thirdly, unions, as these presently operate, are obviously walking contrary to the tenth

commandment, “Thou shalt not covet”. Now, one can indeed covet in many different ways. Nor does one have to belong to a union to covet. But the fact remains, the union exists chiefly because of the covetousness of man. It sets its heart on the abundance of the employer. The union is quick to show that the employer earns too much. The union wants to share that abundance—often even when it has not earned it. Matt. 6:33 is violated, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Fourthly, the union member assumes a certain corporate responsibility for the actions and goals of the union. One may claim that belonging to the union, for him, involves only paying of his dues. He does not attend union meetings; he will not picket; he will not participate in any violence. But such a person deceives himself. To assume willingly ties with such a godless union, does involve one in a measure of guilt for all its actions. Our calling is to walk in separation.

In the fifth place, for a Christian to belong to the union represents a plain violation of II Cor. 6:14, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” In joining a union, the Christian is not joining a “neutral” organization. A union is not, and cannot be, neutral.

In the sixth place, in some instances membership in a union implies a promise to submit to the decisions of that union—even when these are in conflict with other organizations such as the church. Yet no child of God could make such promise to worldly unions.

You, young people, are going to face the problem of unionism more and more. There will be the temptation of leaving our churches and joining such a church which does allow its members to belong to the union. The Christian Reformed Church allows this. Their synodical decisions allow membership ONLY in “neutral” unions. But the term “neutral” has been so stretched that now it covers every existing union. What will you do when it comes to a choice between church and job?

Recent civil rights legislation forbids discrimination because of race or of creed. If that means anything, it should mean that no one ought to lose his job because of the decisions of the church on union membership. But I doubt if such legislation will ever be used to assist us. The church rather stands alone. It need not look to the world for assistance or mercy. It has its citizenship in a higher and better country. It must be separate in this world of sin and evil. And our God, Who is our Guide even unto death, will provide. He has done this in the past; He will do this in the future.

For a more detailed study of this question, I would strongly urge you to read (if you have not already) the articles of the Rev. J. A. Heys in recent issues of the *Standard Bearer*.

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