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The Principles of Separation • Overcoming Earthliness

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“The age in which we live calls for reformatory action.”
—Testimonies, vol. 4, p. 488.

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Ever since my childhood, I have always been amazed when, after a rain, a majestic rainbow appears on the horizon. The harmonious combination of a variety of colors produces a very positive impression on us. For sure, you, too, have seen a rainbow.

After the Flood, God renewed His covenant of grace with Noah and his descendants. He promised that He would never again destroy this planet with water. As a sign of His covenant, He said: "This is the token of the covenant. . . . I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and . . . you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Genesis 9:12–16).

"The Lord declares that when He looks upon the bow, He will remember His covenant. . . . It was God's purpose that as the children of after generation should ask the meaning of the glorious arch which spans the heavens, their parents should repeat the story of the Flood, and tell them that the Most High had bended the bow and placed it in the clouds as an assurance that the waters should never again overflow the earth."¹

A question for you: Have you ever told your children the story and the meaning of the rainbow? Did you tell them the connection between the rainbow and the covenant of grace?

We can be sure that God will faithfully fulfill His promise of not destroying this earth with a flood. This planet will be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:1–7).

In a vision revealed to the prophet John, the throne of God was shown encircled by a rainbow. He wrote that "there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" (Revelation 4:3).

What is the spiritual meaning of the beautiful rainbow? The perfect combination of justice and mercy. If God would implement only justice, all sinners would be immediately destroyed, since the wages of sin is eternal death. However, because of His mercy and grace, all sinners can be saved if they accept His provision for their salvation.

"As the Holy Spirit rested upon the prophet [John], he sees a door opened in heaven, and hears a voice calling him to look upon the things which shall be hereafter. And he says, 'Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone' (Revelation 4:2, 3). Ministering angels were around about Him, waiting and eager to do His will, while the rainbow of God's promise, which was a token of His covenant with Noah, was seen by John encircling the throne on high—a **pledge of God's mercy to every repentant, believing soul**. It is an everlasting testimony that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16). It declares to the whole world that God will never forget His people in their struggle with evil."²

"The rainbow round about the throne is an assurance that God is true, that in Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. We have sinned against Him and are undeserving of His favor; yet He Himself has put into our lips that most wonderful of pleas, 'Do not abhor us, for Thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory; remember, break not Thy covenant with us' (Jeremiah 14:21). When we come to Him confessing our unworthiness and sin, He has pledged Himself to give heed to our cry. The honor of His throne is staked for the fulfillment of His word unto us."³

Let us teach and repeat this wonderful story of God's covenant of grace to our children and those around us! *R*

References

¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 106.

² *Christ Triumphant*, p. 314. [Emphasis added.]

³ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 148.

The Rainbow



Overcoming EARTHLINESS

By D. P. Silva

Scripture declares: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1, 2).

According to Webster’s Dictionary, “earthliness” refers to the quality or state of being earthly.

“Earthly” means: 1. Pertaining to the earth or to this world; pertaining to the present state of existence; as, earthly objects; earthly residence. 2. Belonging to the earth or world; carnal: opposed to spiritual or heavenly. 3. Made of earth; earthly.

According to Webster’s definition, there are slightly different applications of this word “earthly.” Let us see some various ways whereby Jesus and His disciples use this word.

Jesus

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Christ inquired: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things” (John 3:12)? Jesus used “earthly things” as an illustration of heavenly things. Then He went on to explain the difference between “earthly” human beings and heavenly beings.

“He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all” (verse 31).

While the word “earthly” in the first citation (verse 12) could be understood to refer to merely the natural world, the second one is stronger in its reference to our sinful nature. It reveals the transformation that we all need.

Paul

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers about the difference between our human body and the heavenly body: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

To the Philippians believers, he describes a life guided by earthly principles, and he says that the end of such a life is destruction: “(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things)” (Philippians 3:18, 19).

Here, Paul clearly uses the expression “earthly” to speak of the carnal heart.

James

James describes the wisdom that comes from the earth with these strong words:

“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:13–15), and he identifies this wisdom as carnal.

How serious a matter is this?

We just read from three Bible authorities, each indicating earthliness—also known as the carnal mind—as a quality demonstrating an unsanctified life.

Let us also consider various factors often associated with earthliness:

“Look at the condition of the men who give themselves up to intemperance. Littleness, earthliness, degradation, mark their entire character. This is the result of their evil course. They have been walking in the way of their own heart, and in the sight of their own eyes, and are filled with their own devices. Their wretched homes are a hell, made so by themselves. ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’ (Galatians 6:7).”¹

“Those who fail to connect with God, and to receive wisdom and grace to refine and elevate their own lives, will be judged for the good they might have done but failed to perform because they were content with earthliness of mind and friendship with the unsanctified.”²

“What a work might have been done for us as individuals, if our proud and stubborn wills had been wholly submerged in the will of God and our souls lifted up from earthliness to a higher, purer atmosphere!

“Self-will and pride are evils that turned angels into demons and barred the gates of heaven against them.”³

We are to “‘walk in the light, as he is in the light’ (1 John 1:7). It is earthliness and selfishness that separate from God.”⁴

Earthliness is an obstacle that blocks our relationship with God and hinders us from understanding spiritual truths

Jesus had many things to reveal to His disciples, but because of their earthliness, they could not understand the deeper truths that would be their privilege to receive from the Master. Christ said to them: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:12–14).

“Because of their selfishness and earthliness, even the disciples of Jesus could not comprehend the spiritual glory which He sought to reveal unto them. It was not until after Christ’s ascension to His Father, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the believers, that the disciples fully appreciated the Saviour’s character and mission. After they had received the baptism of the Spirit, they began to realize that they had been in the very presence of the Lord of glory.”⁵

One of the symptoms of their earthliness was the desire to be greater than their own brethren. The request of the brothers James and John to be at the right and the left side of Jesus in His supposed earthly kingdom is a prime example that illustrates their earthliness.

“James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the

other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:35–45).

“Jesus bears tenderly with them, not rebuking their selfishness in seeking preference above their brethren. He reads their hearts, He knows the depth of their attachment to Him. Their love is not a mere human affection; though defiled by the earthliness of its human channel, it is an outflowing from the fountain of His own redeeming love. He will not rebuke, but deepen and purify.”⁶

The disciples did not even realize how much their earthliness prevented them from appreciating and loving Jesus and respecting one another as they should. But as they submitted to the Holy Spirit, His influence raised them above that earthliness and brought them to recognize and accept His love and extend it to one another.

Other symptoms of earthliness

“Have we not everything to make us heavenly minded? Have we not everything to bring us right up from this earthliness and sensuality, this cheap and nonsensical talk, this jesting and joking, this false

reporting, babbling, and evil surmising? Put it all away! It is a disgrace to the church! It enfeebles and weakens the church.

“Let our conversation be holy. As God is holy in His sphere, let us be holy in ours. Let us rejoice in the precious Saviour, who has died to redeem us, and reflect glory back to God. Let us join with heaven in our praises here and unite with the songs of the heavenly angels in the city of our God.”⁷

What can we do about our tendency toward earthliness?

For sure, Christians need to get rid of this condition. But how can we? Paul answers this question in Colossians 3:2, bidding us: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” In other words, we are to set our mind on eternal things, not on earthly, temporal things.

In addressing the responsibility of parents and of teachers to help children—and themselves—to learn to know God and submit to Him in the daily routines of life, there is an interesting object lesson given by Inspiration with regard to the connection between earthliness and selfishness:

“God has given to parents and teachers the work of educating the children and youth, . . . and from every act of their lives they may be taught spiritual lessons. While training them in habits of physical cleanliness, we should teach them that God desires them to be clean in heart as well as in body. While sweeping a room, they may learn how the Lord purifies the heart. They would not close the doors and windows and leave in the room some purifying substance, but would open the doors and throw wide the windows, and with diligent effort expel all the dust. So the windows of impulse and feeling must be opened toward heaven, and the dust of selfishness and earthliness must be expelled.”⁸

Trials and obstacles are tools that God uses to redeem us from earthliness

“Trial is part of the education given in the school of Christ, to purify God’s children from the dross of earthliness. It is because God is leading His children that trying experiences come to them. Trials and obstacles are His chosen methods of discipline, and His appointed conditions of success. He

who reads the hearts of men knows their weaknesses better than they themselves can know them. He sees that some have qualifications which, if rightly directed, could be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these souls into different positions and varied circumstances, that they may discover the defects that are concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to overcome these defects and to fit themselves for service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to burn, that they may be purified.”⁹

“Christ desires nothing so much as to redeem His heritage from the dominion of Satan. But before we are delivered from Satan’s power without, we must be delivered from his power within. The Lord permits trials in order that we may be cleansed from earthliness, from selfishness, from harsh, unchristlike traits of character. He suffers the deep waters of affliction to go over our souls in order that we may know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, in order that we may have deep heart longings to be cleansed from defilement, and may come forth from the trial purer, holier, and happier. Often we enter the furnace of trial with our souls darkened with selfishness; but if patient under the crucial test, we shall come forth reflecting the divine character. When His purpose in the affliction is accomplished, ‘He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday’ (Psalm 37:6).”¹⁰

“We should not dishonor our Lord by a mournful relation of trials that appear grievous. All trials that are received as educators will produce joy.”¹¹

The Bible is another tool God uses to redeem us from earthliness

“The truths of the Bible, received, will uplift the mind from its earthliness and debasement. If the Word of God were appreciated as it should be, both young and old



would possess an inward rectitude, a strength of principle, that would enable them to resist temptation.”¹²

“If the truths of the Bible are woven into practical life, they will bring the mind up from its earthliness and debasement.”¹³

Victory only by grace

“Let no one think he can overcome without the help of God. You must have the energy, the strength, the power, of an inner life developed within you. You will then bear fruit unto godliness and will have an intense loathing of vice. You need to constantly strive to work away from earthliness, from cheap conversation, from everything sensual, and aim for nobility of soul and a pure and unspotted character. Your name may be kept so pure that it cannot justly be connected with anything dishonest or unrighteous, but will be respected by all the good and pure, and it may be written in the Lamb’s book of life, to be immortalized among the holy angels.”¹⁴

“The grace of God must sweep through the chambers of the mind, the imagination must have heavenly themes for contemplation, and every element of the nature must be purified and vitalized by the Spirit of God.”¹⁵

“In every church there is need of the simplicity of living, abiding faith. The people are starving for the bread of life. The teachers of the word need the unction from the Holy One. Because they are not united to Christ by faith, their spiritual perceptions are not acute to discern the working of the Spirit of God. Earthliness, carnality, marks the experience of many, making them bodies of darkness rather than of light. Hence there are jealousies, envyings, and divisions. Many are trying to patch up an old experience, instead of turning to Christ in penitence and faith. There are some of this class who have an understanding of the theory of the truth and desire to labor for others; but their efforts will be in vain, for their own souls are not aglow with the love of Jesus.”¹⁶

“We need to be refined, cleansed from all earthliness, till we reflect the image of our Saviour, and become ‘partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust’ (2 Peter 1:4).”¹⁷

In the time of trouble the last vestiges of earthliness will be removed

“Jacob’s history is also an assurance that God will not cast off those who have been deceived and tempted and betrayed into sin, but who have returned unto Him with true repentance. While Satan seeks to destroy this class, God will send His angels to comfort and protect them in the time of peril. The assaults of Satan are fierce and determined, his delusions are terrible; but the Lord’s eye is upon His people, and His ear listens to their cries. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but the Refiner will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. God’s love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity; but it is needful for them to be placed in the furnace fire; their earthliness must be consumed that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected.”¹⁸

“Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”¹⁹

The ultimate goal of the gospel is to restore the image of God (Genesis 1:27) in His children and bring them back to the Edenic condition when

humanity lived in full harmony with God’s will— perfectly reflecting the Creator’s image.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man’s necessity. He ‘took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,’ that He might minister to every need of humanity (Matthew 8:17). The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character.”²⁰

“We can see in the cross of Calvary what it has cost the Son of God to bring salvation to a fallen race. As the sacrifice in behalf of man was complete, so the restoration of man from the defilement of sin must be thorough and complete.”²¹

May God deliver each one of us from all earthliness through the suffering we are called to endure, as well as through the power of His Word and the tender ministry of His Holy Spirit. And may we allow God to work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure! Amen. *R*

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- ³ *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 115.
- ⁴ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 254.
- ⁵ *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 506, 507.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 548.
- ⁷ *Faith and Works*, p. 79.
- ⁸ *Child Guidance*, pp. 496, 497.
- ⁹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 524.
- ¹⁰ *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 174, 175.
- ¹¹ *Reflecting Christ*, p. 284.
- ¹² *Child Guidance*, p. 506.
- ¹³ *Christian Education*, p. 106.
- ¹⁴ *Medical Ministry*, p. 144.
- ¹⁵ *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 206.
- ¹⁶ *Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 105.
- ¹⁷ *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, p. 355.
- ¹⁸ *The Great Controversy* (1888), p. 621.
- ¹⁹ *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 69.
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- ²¹ *Christian Education*, p. 112.



Developing a Heart to Obey

By Angel Salazar, Jr.

When I was a boy, I loved it when my mother would bring home sweets after work. One day she brought cookies for my sisters and me. As always, the condition was not to eat the cookies before dinner. Well, I disobeyed. My mother found out, so she called me and sat down with me.

She asked me if I have eaten some of the cookies, the ones she had said not to eat. Trembling, I said “Yes, I did.”

To disobey my mother was always a bad decision. I knew the punishment, and I thought it was surely coming. She took out the belt.

In my mind I was searching for ideas of how I could get away from the belt. So the first thing that came into my mind I said to my mother, “Mom, before you spank me, let us pray first.”

I said this to her because in my mind I was hoping that if we prayed first, then she might have a change of heart and wouldn’t spank me.

We both knelt down and my mother prayed: “Dear Lord Jesus, you know that my son hasn’t been obedient lately. I ask you to give me the help I need to educate him in the right path, in Your path. Please give me the strength and wisdom to spank my son not so hard but not so soft either; just enough to make him understand that he needs to obey. Amen.”

With tears in my eyes
I said: “Amen!”

Instead of our prayer allowing me to escape, it led me to say “Amen” to my own punishment. I had to accept it now.

God tells us: “It shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. . . . But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Curse shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field” (Deuteronomy 28:1–3, 15, 16).

Obedience to God and disobedience to God each reflect the type of lifestyle we have chosen. If we have sincerely committed our lives to God, then we are going to obey Him; we are going to trust Him and leave all the consequences to Him.

In times of disobedience, we lean on our own desires for direction. We vacillate back and forth between what we want to do and what we know is right.

“Christ came to this world to give them a living example of what they all must be, and parents who claim to believe the truth for this time are to teach their children to love God and to obey His law. This is the greatest and most important work that fathers and mothers can do. . . . It is God’s design that even the children and youth shall understand intelligently what God requires, that they may distinguish

between righteousness and sin, between obedience and disobedience.”¹

What we can expect

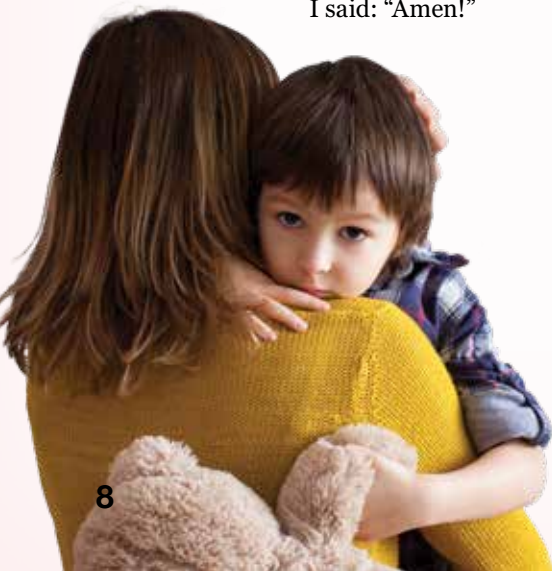
God never intended for us to be harassed by the experience of making decisions each day. Sometimes when we pray, we immediately discern the will of God. Other times, we must wait, trusting Him to show us when and how to move forward. Still at other times, He spends a great deal of time preparing us to step forward through an open door. But when the opportunity comes, God does not want us to hesitate with feelings of worry and doubt. “For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:6, 7).

Then there are situations that result from a relaxed attitude about purity and holiness. I cannot begin to count the number of times I have asked a person why he or she allowed sin to gain such a stronghold in his or her life.

One man confessed that he had been around a certain type of sin most of his life. He did not realize its influence upon him until he realized that he did not have the joy and peace that he believed a Christian should experience. He had moments of happiness but nothing that lasted. He noticed that every time he tried to pray, his mind filled with images that were sinful and wrong. The enemy knows when we have withheld our obedience to God. Like a well-trained warrior, he moves in for the attack, but often his approach is not a full frontal assault. It is subtle and hidden, like a landmine just below the surface.

Is it okay to disobey just this once?

The mistake we make is in assuming that we can ignore God’s



commandment to obey Him and not suffer harm. The bottom line is that there is never a time when it is OK to disobey God. We should obey Him regardless of what we think, or how we feel. It is a matter of choice, but one that many Christians do not yet understand or submit to. Far too often, people evaluate their circumstances according to what they perceive will profit them: *“How will this help me get ahead?”* or *“Will this move be beneficial to my future?”* We say we believe God is all-wise and knows what is best for us, but often we end up looking for advice from people around us and not from the only One who knows everything we need to know. We need to consider only one issue: *“Is this God’s will for my life?”*

Disobedience is not always wrapped in a dangerous or sinful-looking package. Yet it is sinful to disobey God because it hurts the heart of Someone who loves each one of us and has a plan for our lives. It damages our fellowship with Him and leads to feelings of guilt and shame.

Disobedience is not only choosing to do wrong; it is also failing to do right. We disobey God when we refuse to do what He has gifted, trained, and called us to do. Our refusal to be open to His plan can bring misery and regret. On our own, we do not have significant insight into the future. All we can do is make choices based on what may or may not take place. When all is said and done, only one Person has absolute knowledge, and that is the Lord. And He has promised to provide the guidance we need. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones”* (Proverbs 3:5–8, NASB).

Learning to obey from the heart

We can worry, fret, and fume about an issue that God has already resolved

in a way that we do not like. But if we trust Him, we will obey Him each and every time. Being obedient does not mean that we will never face difficult decisions. It means that when we do, we will resolve that He has gone before us; and because we have committed our lives to Him, the way we travel will be straight, sure, and manageable. The prophet Isaiah reassured us: *“The Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail”* (Isaiah 58:11, NASB).

You and I learn obedience. We are not born with the desire to obey God or anyone in authority. It is a learning process. When you were born, you grew to a certain age, and then you began to test how far you could go before your dad or mom gave you a warning. At first, you may have listened when your parents said no, and you stopped what you were doing. But there quickly came a point—probably even before your first birthday—when you decided that ignoring the word *no* was not a big deal.

But ignoring your parent’s expression of the word “no” became a big deal when you continued to ignore the warning and received a rebuke. I cannot remember when I started testing the strength and certainty of my parents’ authority. But I recall doing it many times after I was old enough to remember my own behavior.

If we do not like authority, then we are going to rebel against it. Often children grow up naturally rebelling because their parents do not teach them to obey. If there is a spirit of obedience ruling our life, then we are going to willingly and lovingly choose to be obedient. There are certain rules that we have to obey.

“Shall we not teach our children that willing obedience to the will of God proves whether those claiming to be Christians are Christian indeed? The Lord means every word He says. Christ died that the transgressor of the law of God might be brought back

to His loyalty, that He might keep the commandments of God, and His law as the apple of His eye, and live. God cannot take rebels into His kingdom; therefore He makes obedience to His requirements a special requirement. Parents should diligently teach their children what saith the Lord.”²

From time to time, I find it necessary to evaluate what my behavior tells me about myself. How can I categorize my life? How would you categorize your life? Am I committed to obeying the Lord only when it is obvious that obedience to Him is best for me? Do I think to myself, “I just have this feeling inside every time someone tells me what to do. A wave comes over me, and I can sense this feeling building within that makes me want to say, ‘I know what I’m doing, and I know what is best?’”

Or am I willing to do whatever God asks of me, because He asked me, even when it does not make sense? Am I willing to trust God to be right all the time, instead of only when what He says is convenient?

Some of you as readers may think, “You do not know what I have to go through if I am going to obey!” Someone reading this may think, *“My mother or my father was so demanding that I just want to say no to authority no matter what is involved.”* These are harsh statements, but I have heard ones like them and more.

The truth is: if you do not come to a conclusion of faith and obedience—it takes both—then your life is going to be outlined by defeat, failure, disappointment, suffering, and one wrong decision after another. You must believe in the One whom God has sent to you.

What an awesome way to live the rest of our life—in the shadow of our heavenly Father’s constant care, in the light of His truth and eternal glory! *R*

References

¹ *Child Guidance*, p. 81.

² *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 112.

Insights Into the Hebrew Economy

Part 2 of 2

By Peter D. Lonsdale



In our last issue of the Reformation Herald, we examined the prophecies given to the patriarch Abraham leading up to the Passover deliverance, symbolic of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We also saw how the time of the crucifixion—even the hour of the day when it occurred—had been foreshadowed through the sacrificial system.

Festivals Associated with the Harvest

The Passover was not the only celebration at the festival in the month of Abib. Associated with it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread together with two special ceremonial Sabbaths. “And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein” (Leviticus 23:6–8). The first ceremonial Sabbath was held on the 15th day and the other on the 21st day of that month.

As part of this celebration they were to wave a sheaf of barley on the 16th day, the day after the first ceremonial Sabbath. This was called the Feast of First Fruits. “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (verses 10, 11).

We know it to be barley because it is the earliest grain to ripen in Palestine. The first fruits of wheat were presented seven weeks later. “And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat

harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end" (Exodus 34:22). When the first Passover was celebrated in Egypt, it was barley that was already ripe. "And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was bolled" (Exodus 9:31).¹ This is why the Passover must be after the barley is beginning to ripen.

"The Passover was followed by the seven day's feast of unleavened bread. The first and the seventh day were days of holy convocation, when no servile work was to be performed. On the second day of the feast, the first fruits of the year's harvest were presented before God. Barley was the earliest grain in Palestine, and at the opening of the feast it was beginning to ripen. A sheaf of this grain was waved by the priest before the altar of God, as an acknowledgment that all was His. Not until this ceremony had been performed was the harvest to be gathered."²

The first yearly festival was associated with the barley harvest while the second was associated with the wheat harvest. The last festival of the year was associated with the final ingathering of all the crops. These were the three yearly festivals. "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:17).

Regulated by the Lunar Cycle

The timing of these yearly festivals was regulated by the agricultural cycle and the agricultural cycle was regulated by the lunisolar cycle. "The Jewish calendar is lunisolar—i.e., regulated by the positions of both the moon and the sun. It consists usually of 12 alternating lunar months of 29 and 30 days each (except for Heshvan and Kislev, which sometimes have either 29 or 30 days), and totals 353, 354, or 355 days per year. The average lunar year (354 days) is adjusted to the solar year (365 ¼ days) by the periodic introduction of leap years in order to assure that the major festivals fall in their proper season."³

These calculations were based on the actual sightings of the moon.

"The testimony of two witnesses who had observed the New Moon was ordinarily required to proclaim a new month. . . . With the decline of the Sanhedrin, calendrical matters were decided by the Palestinian patriarchate (the official heads of the Jewish community under Roman rule). Jewish persecution under Constantius II (reigned 337–361) and advances in astronomical science led to the gradual replacement of observations by calculation."⁴ By 359 A.D. they had introduced a fixed and continuous calendar.

Those who tried to keep the calendar month to accommodate the festivals used two things to determine the monthly cycle. "The Karaites, a sect founded in the 8th century, refused, with some exceptions, to recognize the normative fixed calendar and reintroduced observation of the New Moon. Leap years were determined by observing the maturation of the barley crop in Palestine. Consequently, Karaites often celebrated the festivals on dates different from those fixed by the rabbis."⁵

Observations of the moon are still used by some farmers today. (As a child, I remember my father studying the cycles of the moon in order to know when to plant various crops. He was an "old-school" farmer using different phases of the moon as his guide. As a result, our farm produced really great crops and became well known in the Sacramento, California, area for its quality produce. Newspaper articles showcased the ample harvests!)

As important as these festivals were, they were to be limited to Palestine; they were impractical in other parts of the world. The simple reason was that a festival could not be held without the normal cycle of planting and harvest. For example, the Feast of First Fruits was not for the wilderness, as they had no sheaves of first fruits to wave before the Lord. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest

thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest" (Leviticus 23:10). It was only designed for an agrarian economy, not for a wilderness sojourn.

When God gave the ceremonial system of feasts at Sinai, they were supposed to be in the land of Canaan in a very short time. As they were nearing the end of the 2nd month⁶ of the second year, they were already leaving Sinai, bound for the promised land. Because of their rebellion associated with Korah and his comrades a short time later, the rite of circumcision was suspended⁷ and the Passover was discontinued until after the 40 years of wandering, when there was something to eat from the local harvest fields and when circumcision was once again restored. "And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: unto whom the Lord swore that he would not shew them the land, which the Lord swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way" (Joshua 5:3–7).

Since circumcision had been restored and there were products from the local harvest available, they could now keep the Passover along with the associated festivals. "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even



in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day” (Joshua 5:10, 11).

From this it is obvious that they could not hold the Feast of First Fruits of the barley or wheat nor the Feast of Ingathering until there was something to harvest. It is also evident that **God planned the yearly gatherings when their workload was the least. It was not to interfere with the planting and harvesting, quite unlike the seventh-day Sabbath.** “Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing

time and in harvest thou shalt rest” (Exodus 34:21). The seventh day was so sacred that it did not matter if they had a heavy workload or not. The annual festivals, on the other hand, were not an intrusion upon the nation of Israel but rather accommodated to their agrarian lifestyle. This is why the annual festivals were not based on a civil calendar; they were based on a lunar calendar, which was specifically designed for a farming community.

Differing Lunar Cycles

We know that the Passover takes place sometime during the months of March or April according to the Gregorian calendar. “The first of these festivals, the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, occurred in Abib, the first month of the Jewish year, corresponding to the last of March and the beginning of April. The cold of winter was past, the latter rain had ended, and all nature rejoiced in the freshness and beauty of the springtime. The grass was green on the hills and valleys, and wild flowers everywhere brightened the fields. The moon, now approaching the full, made the evenings delightful.”⁸

During this time, an important part of the ceremony was to wave the sheaf of the first fruits of the ripe barley harvest on the 16th day of Abib.

However, if it happened that you live in the Ukraine, it would have been impossible to present such an offering before God, because the same lunar cycle had a different meaning for those living at different latitudes. The winter barley does not get harvested in the Ukraine until June, and in the United Kingdom the winter barley is not ready for harvest until July. This is not even to mention the fact that there are believers now living in Australia where the winter barley harvest is not done until November or December in New South Wales. It would be totally impossible for them to wave this barley in March or April. They don’t even plant it until May or June.

The whole Hebrew system was largely based on agriculture. For this reason the inheritance of land was so important and keeping that land in the family was paramount. “And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family” (Leviticus 25:10).

All this shows that God never intended the localized lunar calendar that regulated the annual feast days in

Palestine to be used all over the world, as the harvest dates differ from one locality to another and even occur at a completely different time of the year from one hemisphere to another.

In Jerusalem

Because the annual festivals were based on location, the Passover and the other festivals were not to be kept in the local congregation wherever people lived, but rather had to be kept before the Lord. “Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God.” Wherever the sanctuary was located, that was the designated place all the faithful had to appear before God. “There were three annual assemblies of all Israel for worship at the sanctuary. Exodus 23:14–16. Shiloh was for a time the place of these gatherings; but Jerusalem afterward became the center of the nation’s worship, and here the tribes convened for the solemn feasts.”⁹ It was considered apostasy to hold them anywhere else.

This was a central location for all of them in Israel.¹⁰ The farthest a Jew would have gone was to Europe—and they still could arrive in time for these holy days. At times some would spend more than a month just in travel time and attendance at these annual festivals in Jerusalem.¹¹ The reason why the feast had to be held there was because the people needed not only the temple service—the agricultural element was also very important to them. They could not complete the harvest until the wave sheaf was presented before the Lord. At the end of the year they were to present their gifts of a completed harvest.

The Feast of Weeks was also dependent on the harvest time. “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall

be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.” [This was also waved before the Lord.] “And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave-offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest” (Leviticus 23:15–17, 20). This ceremony was based on the wheat harvest. “And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year’s end” (Exodus 34:22).

The Feast of Tabernacles was also dependent on the harvest times and hence was also called the Feast of Ingathering. “And the Feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field” (Exodus 23:16). This was celebrated in the Autumn when the harvest was over. “Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath” (Leviticus 23:39).

Conclusion and Summary

From these statements we can clearly see that the annual festivals of the Hebrew nation were designed for the inhabitants of Palestine (or for those that could get to Palestine within a reasonable amount of time), and these feasts revolved around their harvest calendar. Because they were so closely entwined with their local planting and harvest times, and because they were living in an agrarian society, those times were ideal for the gatherings of the people to be instructed in the law of God. Therefore God required all the males in the entire Hebrew nation to be present at these festivals where the sanctuary was located, first in Shiloh and then in Jerusalem.

It is for this reason that the lunar cycle cannot be used as the religious basis of God’s people on a united, worldwide level. It was purely

local to Palestine and designed to accommodate the local agricultural economy of the Hebrew nation. To attend such a meeting in Palestine from Australia today would be meaningless, as it would have nothing to do with the cycle of harvesting grain and would be at the wrong time of the year to be of any benefit. A farmer could not go there to ask for a blessing on the harvest which was not yet planted. The worldwide intent of the gospel is clear in the great commission, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). *R*

References

- ¹ “The flax and barley were ruined, because the barley was ripe and the flax in bud” (Exodus 9:31). (Complete Jewish Bible.)
- ² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 539.
- ³ “The Cycle of the Religious Year,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 15th edition (1986), vol. 22, p. 446.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ “And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony. And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran” (Numbers 10:11, 12).
- ⁷ “The suspension of the rite of circumcision since the rebellion at Kadesh had been a constant witness to Israel that their covenant with God, of which it was the appointed symbol, had been broken. And the discontinuance of the Passover, the memorial of their deliverance from Egypt, had been an evidence of the Lord’s displeasure at their desire to return to the land of bondage. Now, however, the years of rejection were ended. Once more God acknowledged Israel as His people, and the sign of the covenant was restored. The rite of circumcision was performed upon all the people who had been born in the wilderness. And the Lord declared to Joshua, ‘This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you,’ and in allusion to this the place of their encampment was called Gilgal, ‘a rolling away,’ or ‘rolling off.’”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 485, 486.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 537.
- ⁹ *Agrimarket Weekly Report*, June 15, 2011; www.apk-inform.com/en/news/1005489.
- ¹⁰ “The winter crop is normally harvested in July with those spring sown following about a month later.” *UK Agriculture*. www.ukagriculture.com/crops/barley_uk.cfm.
- ¹¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 537.

The Coin *of the Realm*



A compilation from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, with comments by B. Montrose

Historically, the world's most valuable coins often have been made of gold. While today there are other precious metals that are technically more useful and expensive by weight, the lure of gold still remains—so much so that modern cynics are quick to quip, “He who has the gold, rules,” implying that possessions and positions are the aims most to be desired in life. In a time when genuine friends are few and money can be tight, even professed believers may be tempted to be embittered into adopting such a mentality. But Jesus has a much more rewarding plan with **His** “golden rule”—the **real** golden rule—the spirit of service established by the Monarch of the universe.

The Lord explains: “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among

you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28).

Escaping the dog-eat-dog society

Have you ever seen two canines meet for the first time? They have an interesting ritual. The first thing they do is to sniff around the body of one another. That immediately tells each of them something about the gender and age of the other. Then, each dog will make a fast decision as to whether the other is likely to be a friend to whom to extend patient tolerance (for example, if it's a harmless young puppy)—or a rival that could possibly end up as a potential threat (such as a canine of the same gender and approximate age). One dog will then quickly observe the disposition of the other to see whether the other “turns the cheek” and allows this simple act of

canine courtesy to take place. If the other refuses to turn the cheek, it's quite likely that a nasty confrontation is brewing, ready to display itself within a matter of seconds. The sad thing is that because of the sin problem existing on our fallen planet, dogs tend to be quite competitive.

What about us?

Suppose you've just met someone for the first time—maybe within the church or from the public at large. Either way, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? . . . Is it ever something like:

“How can I be the ‘alpha’ figure in this relationship? How can I get this person to look up to me and respect me and my accomplishments in life?”

If so—and you are a Christian, believe it or not, there may be a serious attitude issue brewing here—an attitude that needs to be adjusted. Why?

“The Jews had been concerned about what they should receive; the

burden of their anxiety was to secure what they thought their due of power and respect and service.”¹

This statement is not generalizing about all Jewish people in general—rather it is specifically referring to the typical Jews in Christ’s day—the most religious people in the world, solemnly entrusted with the sacred oracles of God.

The statement goes on to say, “**But Christ teaches that our anxiety should not be, How much are we to receive? but, How much can we give?**”²

So, there’s a sharp contrast here. Jesus says that we should **not** be like those Jews were. Therefore, all that we might feel inclined to hope for from our interaction with someone—whether it be financial gain, admiration, or any other benefit—is not to be the aim in our relationship with that other person. Instead, it should be focused on how we can benefit him or her.

“In your association with others, put yourself in their place. Enter into their feelings, their difficulties, their disappointments, their joys, and their sorrows. Identify yourself with them, and then do to them as, were you to exchange places with them, you would wish them to deal with you. This is the true rule of honesty. It is another expression of the law. ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ (Matthew 22:39). And it is the substance of the teaching of the prophets. It is a principle of heaven, and **will** be developed in all who are fitted for its holy companionship.”³

So, if we lack this principle of heaven that we are told **will** be (*i.e.*, **must** be—not an optional **might** be) developed in those preparing for heaven, then we are missing the boat, so to speak.

The Heaven-sent contrast

Thankfully, we have been provided with the life of Jesus to be our example. What do we see in Him?

“Oh, what rays of softness and beauty shone forth in the daily life

of our Saviour! What sweetness flowed from His very presence! The same spirit will be revealed in His children. Those with whom Christ dwells will be surrounded with a divine atmosphere. Their white robes of purity will be fragrant with perfume from the garden of the Lord. Their faces will reflect light from His, brightening the path for stumbling and weary feet.

“No man who has the true ideal of what constitutes a perfect character will fail to manifest the sympathy and tenderness of Christ. The influence of grace is to soften the heart, to refine and purify the feelings.”⁴

This is the first aspect of the golden rule as taught by Christ. There’s more. The passage continues—

“But there is a yet deeper significance to the golden rule. Everyone who has been made a steward of the manifold grace of God is called upon to impart to souls in ignorance and darkness, even as, were he in their place, he would desire them to impart to him. The apostle Paul said, ‘I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise’ (Romans 1:14). By all that you have known of the love of God, by all that you have received of the rich gifts of His grace above the most benighted and degraded soul upon the earth are you in debt to that soul to impart these gifts unto him. . . .

“The golden rule teaches, by implication, the same truth which is taught elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount, that ‘with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again’ (Matthew 7:2). That which we do to others, whether it be good or evil, will surely react upon ourselves, in blessing or in cursing. Whatever we give, we shall receive again. The earthly blessings which we impart to others may be, and often are, repaid in kind. **What we give does, in time of need, often come back to us in fourfold measure in the coin of the realm.** But, besides this, all gifts are repaid, even in this life, in the fuller inflowing of His love, which is the sum of all heaven’s glory

and its treasure. And evil imparted also returns again. Everyone who has been free to condemn or discourage, will in his own experience be brought over the ground where he has caused others to pass; he will feel what they have suffered because of his want of sympathy and tenderness.”⁵

Are you ready to invest in the coin of the realm?

According to the inspired passage above, “the coin of the realm” often pays dividends of 400% interest, payable exactly when you’re facing your toughest times! This currency is rather like that “gold tried in the fire” which we, as Christian believers living in the Laodicean era, are to be buying (Revelation 3:17, 18).

“**The gold tried in the fire is faith that works by love.** Only this can bring us into harmony with God. We may be active, we may do much work; but **without love, such love as dwelt in the heart of Christ, we can never be numbered with the family of heaven.**”⁶

“Not all can make large offerings, not all can do great works, magnificent deeds; but all can practice self-denial, all can reveal the unselfishness of the Saviour.”⁷

How does this coin also involve literal finances?

In shaky economic times, many urge the benefit of investing in gold and silver. Yet the time will soon come when many “shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity” (Ezekiel 7:19).

So, often the question is asked—What is the safest financial investment today? If we’re really living by the golden rule the way Christ describes it, we’ll have a totally different focus than did the professedly religious people of His day:

“Would you make your property secure? Place it in the hand that bears the nailprint of the crucifixion. Retain it in your possession, and it will be to your eternal loss.”⁸

“Time is short; hoarded wealth will soon be worthless. When the decree shall go forth that none shall buy or sell except they have the mark of the beast, very much means will be of no avail. God calls for us now to do all in our power to send forth the warning to the world.

“We want the brethren to awake to the service of their Master in this missionary work. Let them not set their hearts upon their possessions, and hold them with a miserly grip; but invest their means and use their influence to promote the cause of God, thereby sending treasure to Heaven before them. Love of the world is a great hindrance to a Christian life. It strengthens its hold upon the heart almost imperceptibly, and eclipses the value of Heaven and the virtue of the atonement, in the mind. It supersedes the love of God and His truth, and becomes the very root of all evil. . . .

“[Many] have cherished the love of money till it has become an all-absorbing passion, and Heaven does not seem as valuable to them as their present earthly treasure. How can they keep the commandments as God requires them to be kept, yet place two-thirds of their affections upon the world? Such a life dishonors our holy faith. . . .

“It was not pleasant for Christ to leave the purity and bliss of Heaven, and the society of holy angels, and come to a world all seared and marred by the curse of sin, and die to save fallen man from the consequences of his iniquity. Are we willing to imitate the life and character of Christ? Are we willing to suffer, if need be, for His sake, to forego some of the comforts of life in order to save our perishing fellow-creatures from eternal death? If so, we should be willing to give much from our abundance toward this purpose.

“What a fearful mistake that young ruler made when he turned from the

requirements of Christ and decided to risk the consequence of being guided by his avaricious spirit. He chose to devote his life to gaining temporal wealth and power, rather than to follow Christ and resign his worldly possessions. Jesus pitied the young man; he saw in him precious material for a preacher of righteousness, if he would but overcome his selfish greed for gain. . . . [Matthew 19:21 quoted.]

“Jesus only required him to go where He led the way. The thorny path of duty becomes easier to follow when we trace His divine footsteps before us, pressing down the briars. Christ would have accepted this talented and noble ruler, if he had yielded to His requirements, as readily as He accepted the poor fishermen whom He bade to follow him. The young man’s ability to acquire property was not against him, provided he loved his neighbor as himself, and had not wronged another in acquiring his riches. That very ability, had it been employed in the service of God in seeking to save souls from ruin, would have been acceptable to the divine Master, and he might have made a diligent and successful worker for Christ. But he refused the exalted privilege of cooperating with Christ in the salvation of souls; he turned away from the glorious treasure promised him in the kingdom of God, and clung to the fleeting treasures of earth.

“We fear this is the case with many who profess to keep the commandments of God. Love of gain has taken possession of their souls, and they refuse to answer the demands of God in applying their wealth to the spreading abroad of His truth to all tongues and all nations. Jesus touched the plague spot in the young ruler’s heart, which, if not healed, would destroy his soul. He showed him that he was not keeping the commandments of God, since he did not love God supremely, and his neighbor as himself. Jesus offered to make him His companion and a laborer in bringing souls into the kingdom of Heaven. The young man had wealth, education, position, and influence, and was therefore qualified

to work intelligently and successfully for the Master. But his love of the world prevented him from accepting the invitation of Christ.

“The humble fishermen obeyed the call of Jesus and forsook all to follow Him. It may appear to some that it required little self-denial for them to do this, as their business was neither elevated nor lucrative; but it should be remembered that **these men owned boats and nets, and obtained a good livelihood by their occupation. Also their life upon the water had its attractions, and it was a great sacrifice for them to leave the employment in which they had thus far spent their lives.**

“The young ruler represents a large class who would be excellent Christians if there was no cross for them to lift, no humiliating burden for them to bear, no earthly advantages to resign, no sacrifice of property or feelings to make. Christ has entrusted to them capital of talents and means, and He expects corresponding returns. That which we possess is not our own but is to be employed in serving Him from whom we have received all we have. . . .

“Redeem the time while you are spared to work. **All your good works cannot save you; but it is nevertheless impossible for you to be saved without good works.** Every sacrifice made for Christ will be for your eternal gain.”⁹

Wise investments of thought and energy

“We are on the very verge of the time of trouble, and perplexities that are scarcely dreamed of are before us. A power from beneath is leading men to war against Heaven. Human beings have confederated with satanic agencies to make void the law of God. The inhabitants of the world are fast becoming as the inhabitants of the world in Noah’s day, who were swept away by the Flood, and as the inhabitants of Sodom, who were consumed by fire from heaven. The powers of Satan are at work to keep

minds diverted from eternal realities. The enemy has arranged matters to suit his own purposes. Worldly business, sports, the fashions of the day—these things occupy the minds of men and women. Amusements and unprofitable reading spoil the judgment. In the broad road that leads to eternal ruin there walks a long procession. The world, filled with violence, reveling, and drunkenness, is converting the church. The law of God, the divine standard of righteousness, is declared to be of no effect.

“At this time—a time of overwhelming iniquity—a new life, coming from the Source of all life, is to take possession of those who have the love of God in their hearts, and they are to go forth to proclaim with power the message of a crucified and risen Saviour. They are to put

forth earnest, untiring efforts to save souls. Their **example** is to be such that it **will** have a telling influence for good on those around them. They are to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Intense earnestness should now take possession of us. Our slumbering energies should be aroused to untiring effort. Consecrated workers should go forth into the field clearing the King’s highway, and gaining victories in new places. My brother, my sister, is it nothing to you to know that every day souls are going down into the grave unwarned and unsaved, ignorant of their need of eternal life and of the atonement made for them by the Saviour? Is it nothing to you that soon the world is to meet Jehovah over His broken law? Heavenly angels marvel that those who for so many years have

had the light, have not carried the torch of truth into the dark places of the earth. . . .

“We talk of Christian missions. The sound of our voices is heard, but do we feel Christ’s tender heart-longing for souls?

“The Saviour was an untiring worker. He did not measure His work by hours. His time, His heart, His strength, were given to labor for the benefit of humanity. Entire days were devoted to labor, and entire nights were spent in prayer, that He might be braced to meet the wily foe in all his deceptive working, and fortified to do His work of uplifting and restoring humanity. . . .

“The Lord calls for wholeheartedness. We all know that the sin of many professing Christians is that they lack the courage and energy to bring themselves and those connected with them up to the standard. . . .

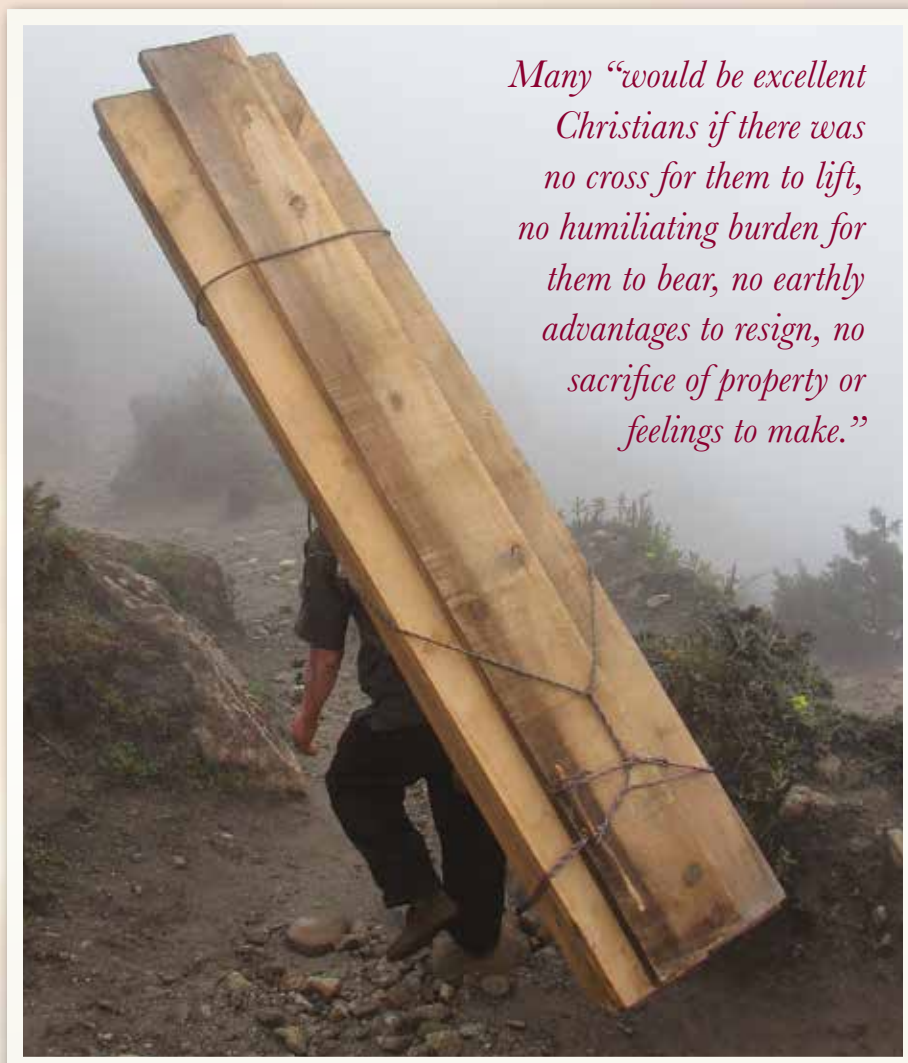
“Heavenly angels have long been waiting for human agents—the members of the church—to cooperate with them in the great work to be done. **They are waiting for you.**”¹⁰

Speaking of the angels: “They never do each other wrong. Princes of heaven, the potentates of this mighty realm, are **rivals only in good, seeking the happiness and joy of each other. The greatest there is least in self-esteem, and the least is greatest in his gratitude and wealth of love.**”¹¹

Shall we not echo their zeal to invest wholeheartedly in the coin of the realm? It’s not too late to begin! *R*

References

- ¹ *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 134.
- ² *Ibid.* [Emphasis added.]
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 135. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 136. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁶ *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 158. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁷ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 54.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 51.
- ⁹ *The Review and Herald*, March 21, 1878. [Emphasis added.]
- ¹⁰ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 43–47. [Emphasis added.]
- ¹¹ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 104. [Emphasis added.]



Many “would be excellent Christians if there was no cross for them to lift, no humiliating burden for them to bear, no earthly advantages to resign, no sacrifice of property or feelings to make.”

Christ Is All *For my Family*



*Highlights from the sermon delivered by M. Stroia at the
Spiritual Meetings of the 22nd SDARM GC Delegation Session*

If we look at this title—*Christ Is All for my Family*, we can identify three elements:

1. Christ
2. Me
3. My Family

Let us consider the connection between these three elements.

In life we always seem to be looking for some experience that will make us happy—to make us feel well, to be content. This is not just for Christians but for everyone.

We live in an age of advertisings and commercials trying to persuade us to buy something that promises to make us happy and to feel good. Because of this, people are often deceived into buying things they don't even need. Many are longing for happiness, yet so few find it.

Joy through the Saviour

We do not want to be happy for only an hour, a day, a week, or a honeymoon, but rather to have an enduring happiness for eternity. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

So, we should consider what it means to be happy for eternity. There is no happiness for eternity without Christ. Many will miss out on eternal life by trying to gain it without Him. To live a meaningful life, we need Jesus to be our all in all.

If we want to achieve things in life, the only way is by maintaining a living connection with Him. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).

Actually, most of us have good intentions in our lives, in society, and in the family. We all want things to run smoothly. But experience shows that the will is not capable enough to accomplish this. Besides the will, we need the power to carry it out. In Romans chapter 7, the apostle Paul describes the experience suffered when one has the will but is lacking in power.

Jesus states clearly, “Without me you can do nothing” in any domain of life—in our profession, in our social lives, in our private lives, and in our family lives.

Some may observe that there are so many achievers in our world—those who build skyscrapers, for example. It seems that they manage to do quite a bit without direct involvement with Christ. Let us realize, however, that when Jesus says, “Without me you can do nothing,” He means nothing lasting to eternity. If we want to do meaningful things—things that are to last forever—we need to be abiding in Him and He in us. Then we will not merely have that trying-and-failing experience, but rather it will be a glorious experience like the apostle Paul reached when he realized how things really work and he was able to testify, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

No matter what you try, whatever your means are, whatever you can afford, you will finally end up coming to the same conclusion: Happiness or unhappiness depends on the presence or on the absence of Christ in our lives—for “the presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy.”¹

Joy in the family circle

A happy man and a happy woman together are very likely to form a happy family because they have this common denominator—Jesus Christ. Although they may differ in some aspects of life, at least they have Christ and are sharing this experience. Having Him as your personal Saviour and close Friend will make you happy. Bringing two such people together will boost their happiness even more, to reach a climax for eternity.

When Christ is in the heart, He is brought into the family. So we cannot just have Christ in our hearts without this experience impacting our family life. It will be felt in the quality of our relationships, leading to a sense of happiness and fulfillment.

Many people imagine that they are in love. But what they understand as love is not what real, genuine love is—which is the only love that can lead to lasting harmony. We may have the best intentions, but our unconverted heart cannot originate or produce this type of love because we are selfish by nature. We were born with this tendency towards selfishness, and it is selfishness that destroys relationships. Therefore the quality of our family life depends on the quality of our relationship with Christ.

“Love is of God. The unconverted heart cannot originate nor produce this plant of heavenly origin, which lives and flourishes only where Christ reigns.”²

“Religion is needed in the home. Only this can prevent the grievous wrongs which so often embitter married life. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish love. Then soul will be knit with soul, and the two lives will blend in harmony. Angels of God will be guests in the home, and their holy vigils will hallow the marriage chamber. Debasing sensuality will be banished. Upward to God will the thoughts be directed; to Him will the heart's devotion ascend.”³

No matter how much we may desire this experience, we cannot generate it—because it is a plant of heavenly origin. Only this type of deep unselfish love can make a relationship that is lasting.

“The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes it. By it human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the Divine nature and trained to grow heavenward. Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides. The warmth of true friendship and the love that binds the hearts of husband and wife are a foretaste of heaven.”⁴

We all want the same thing! But human love is not able to accomplish this, for it is helpless when it comes to self-denial and self-sacrifice. It is only when human love is united to

the divine nature and trained to grow heavenward that we will enjoy the genuine fruit of it. It is the desire of Jesus that we would be happy—not only with Him but also with one another. But the Testimonies reveal that this is actually a rare thing. It is the exception to the rule. In most cases, marriage is actually a galling yoke. But it is your chance and my chance to be the happy exception—to have a happy marriage, to experience this feeling of togetherness around the family fireside.

Sometimes people have problems in their married life. They notice that something is not working right in their marriage. So they may start asking friends or reading books or going to a marriage counseling office for help—which is not bad, by the way. But that is not enough; they need something more than just that. We need something supernatural; we need godly solutions to human problems. It is the grace of Christ, and this alone, that can make this institution what God designed it to be.

Practical Christianity is the result of our being in love with Christ. And our being in love with Christ will change our perspective in our relationships with one another. It will make us have a different understanding and, as a result, will cause us to have a different reaction to the many challenges of daily life.

“Christianity ought to have a controlling influence upon the marriage relation.”⁵

We will no longer lose our patience; we will no longer lose our temper, because there is some influence in control that acts like a kind of filter. When various emotions arise, this controlling influence will allow some to go forward and will restrain some others.

Many people say, “Oh, man, I blew it. I thought I was right, but I married the wrong person!” There is actually a book entitled, *Everybody Marries the Wrong Person*, which is a fact. You do not have 100% compatibility when you get married.

“If we are doers of the word, we shall daily bear the cross after Jesus, subdue self, and thus bring harmony into the home life. The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides. If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other, and cultivate love and confidence. Anything that would mar the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. He who manifests the spirit of tenderness, forbearance, and love will find that the same spirit will be reflected upon him. Where the Spirit of God reigns, there will be no talk of unsuitability in the marriage relation. If Christ indeed is formed within, the hope of glory, there will be union and love in the home. Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband. They will be striving together for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare . . .”⁶

The husband and wife will speak the same love language, because Christ is here and Christ is there—and Christ cannot be other than united.

Husbands

When husbands face some problems at home, they sometimes start studying the nature of women. They begin reading books about the differences between men and women, about the way they think and feel differently so that they can try to make some sense about what is going on. But that will not help them very much. Instead of that, they should study something different. They should study the Pattern.

“Husbands should study the Pattern and seek to know what is meant by the symbol presented in Ephesians, the relation Christ sustains to the church. The husband is to be as a Saviour in his family. Will he stand in his noble, God-given manhood, ever seeking to uplift his wife and children? Will he breathe about him a pure, sweet atmosphere? Will he not as assiduously cultivate the love of Jesus, making it an abiding principle in his home, as he will

assert his claims to authority? Let every husband and father study to understand the words of Christ, not in a one-sided manner, merely dwelling upon the subjection of the wife to her husband, but in the light of the cross of Calvary study as to his own position in the family circle.”⁷

Study the way Jesus loved the church. How did Jesus love the church? Conditionally or unconditionally? The Bible says that while we were still enemies, He died for us—not because of what we were like, but rather in spite of that. He loved us and died for us in spite of our unworthiness. We should study the Pattern. The more we study it, the more lenient we will become towards those around us. If they have shortcomings, if they commit mistakes, we can understand that, because we used to do that before and Christ had a lot of patience towards us. So husbands should study the Pattern—and not only study it, but imitate it. A husband is to be a saviour in his family. To be a saviour means sacrifice. The dimension of this is expressed in the Bible verse: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25).

Considering this love, beholding it, contemplating it, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. This solves marital problems. It brings us closer to the purpose God has always had for the family institution, and it will make us experience that genuine joy and happiness of togetherness.

“All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. . . . We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”⁸

If we take this quiet hour for communion with God, for introspection to try to understand ourselves, the circumstances in our

lives and our relationships, then our reactions will change.

Some might say, “We are too busy for that! We live in this challenging world, and there is no time! Who can afford a whole hour—60 minutes of just doing nothing!” But, in reality, if we do not take this time, it will have such a damaging impact on our lives that nothing will be able to compensate for it.

The Lord “bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10). This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, he who is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace.”⁹

Have you ever tried to argue with a person surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace? You will never manage to have an argument with such a person, because it will not work.

What about the wives?

The adorning should not be an outward adorning of gold and apparel, but rather “the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:4). I like the way this is expressed in the Bible. The translators do not use the word “character” as such, but they convey the notion of character by referring to “the hidden man of the heart.” Take time to improve your character under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Trust in God by being in subjection. Of course, we do it because we love it. Develop the qualities of true charity found in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

Our great need

What is the connection between the quality of our family relationship and our eternal destiny?

“Home religion is greatly needed, and our words in the home should be of a right character, or our testimonies in church will amount to nothing. Unless you manifest meekness, kindness, and courtesy in your home,

your religion will be in vain. If there were more genuine home religion, there would be more power in the church.”¹⁰

You cannot have a disastrous life at home and still be a great Christian. We might experience problems, but we should not be the source of those problems. We should manifest meekness, kindness, and courtesy. Can we do that? Without Christ, never. With Christ, we can always do it. Unless we do it, our religion will be in vain.

When God considers us, He will consider our family relationship—not the way we sing, not the way we preach, not the way we pray, not the way we give lectures or recite poems.

“If we would enjoy eternal bliss, we must cultivate religion in the home; for the home is to be the center of the purest and most elevated affection. . . . The plant of love must be carefully nourished, else it will die.”¹¹

How can we cultivate our relationship in the home? By first cultivating our personal relationship with Christ. If Christ is in our hearts, this will impact our family life.

There needs to be a continuity. The way we are at home needs to be a heaven on earth. The servant of the Lord wrote:

“Among the members of the household there is ever to be a kind, thoughtful consideration. Morning and evening let all hearts be united in reverent worship. At the season of evening worship, let every member of the family search well his own heart. Let every wrong that has been committed be made right. If, during the day, one has wronged another, or spoken unkindly, let the transgressor seek pardon of the one he has injured. Often grievances are cherished in the mind, and misunderstandings and heartaches are created that need not be. If the one who is suspected of wrong be given an opportunity, he might be able to make explanations that would bring relief to other members of the family.”¹²

“Satan is ever ready to take advantage when any matter of

variance arises, and by moving upon the objectionable, hereditary traits of character in husband or wife, he will try to cause the alienation of those who have united their interests in a solemn covenant before God. In the marriage vows they have promised to be as one, the wife covenanting to love and obey her husband, the husband promising to love and cherish his wife. If the law of God is obeyed, the demon of strife will be kept out of the family, and no separation of interests will take place, no alienation of affection will be permitted.”¹³

“To a large extent parents create the atmosphere of the home circle, and when there is disagreement between father and mother, the children partake of the same spirit. Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness.”¹⁴

Actually, we do not argue about real things. When we argue, it is because we are separated from Christ.

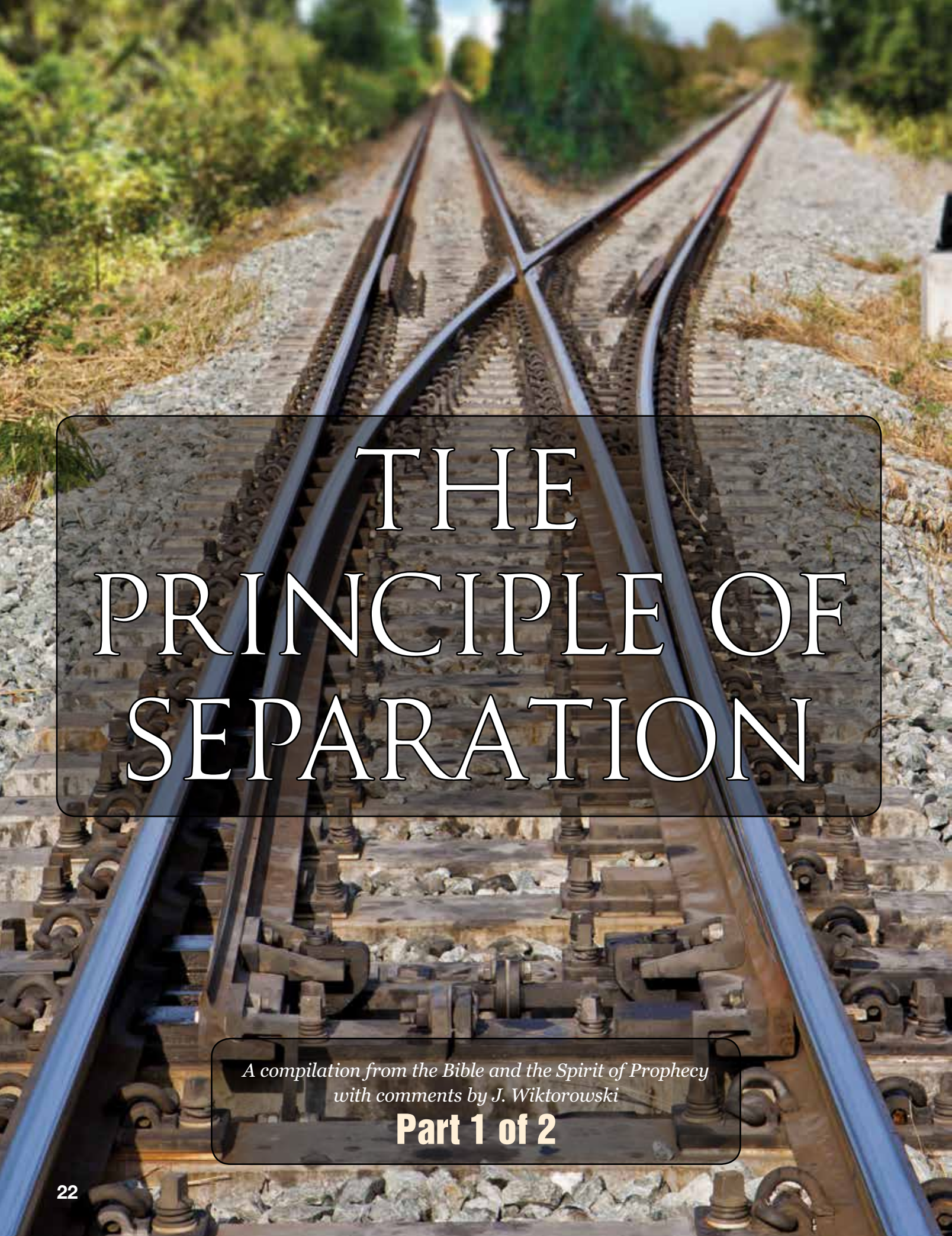
“The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another.”¹⁵

Coming closer to Christ means that we will come closer to one another.

“We can never see the kingdom of heaven unless we have the mind and spirit of Christ. Then copy the pattern at home, at your work, and in the church. . . . While doing all that you can on your part to perfect Christian character, give your heart to God for Him to mold according to His pleasure. He will help you; I know He will.”¹⁶ *R*

References

- ¹ *The Adventist Home*, p. 28.
- ² *Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 312.
- ³ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 362.
- ⁴ *The Bible Echo*, September 4, 1899.
- ⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 563.
- ⁶ *The Signs of the Times*, November 14, 1892.
- ⁷ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21, p. 216.
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- ⁹ *Ibid.*
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- ¹² *The Review and Herald*, November 8, 1906.
- ¹³ *The Adventist Home*, p. 106.
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THE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATION

*A compilation from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy
with comments by J. Wiktorowski*

Part 1 of 2

“We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”¹

A vital statement indeed. But in order not to forget something, we need to be remembering it. What does this “remembering” include here?

“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16). In order to walk in the “old” paths we have to separate from the “new” ways we’ve adopted—paths that have strayed away from God’s perfect design. So we will need to get off of one path and get on another.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18).

If we separate from something by default, we then become united with something else. This is prophesied: “As trials thicken around us, both separation and unity will be seen in our ranks.”²

Principles of unity

Jesus besought His Father in prayer, saying, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:20–22).

We can have that glory when we are united. The inspired psalmist observed, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon,

and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psalm 133).

As important as unity is, the truth cannot be surrendered in order to answer the prayer of Christ that we all be one. This would be like committing the same mistake as Abraham did when he thought he was fulfilling the divine plan by compromising God’s principle with Hagar (Genesis 16:1, 2). So, instead of attempting the ludicrous task of trying to carry out God’s will by breaking God’s law, we need instead to remain firm to the truths that the Lord has plainly revealed.

“Through the Holy Spirit, Christ will open more clearly to those who will believe on Him that which He has inspired holy men to write concerning the truth. And it is thus that the unity for which Christ prayed is to be effected. We are to receive sanctification through obedience to the word and the Spirit of truth.

“We cannot surrender the truth in order to accomplish this union; for the very means by which it is to be gained is sanctification through the truth. Human wisdom would change all this, thinking this basis of union too narrow. Men would effect a union through conformity to popular opinions, through a compromise with the world. But truth is God’s basis for the unity of His people.”³

“Our churches are becoming enfeebled by receiving for doctrines the commandments of men. Many are received into the church who are not converted. Men, women, and children are allowed to take part in the solemn rite of baptism without being fully instructed in regard to the meaning of His ordinance. Participation in this ordinance means much, and our ministers should be careful to give each candidate plain instruction in regard to its meaning and its solemnity. Our church members see that there are differences of opinion among the leading men, and they themselves enter into controversy regarding the subjects under dispute. **Christ calls for unity. But He**

does not call for us to unify on wrong practices. The God of heaven draws a sharp contrast between pure, elevating, ennobling truth and false, misleading doctrines. He calls sin and impenitence by the right name. He does not gloss over wrongdoing with a coat of untempered mortar.”⁴

What about when there are differences?

What happens when we don’t see eye-to-eye? What if there are wrong practices?

1. First, we must study and reason together.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:18–20).

2. Ultimately, if there is no change:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that

are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:11–13).

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

The Reformers in the early centuries suffered anguish in their desire to reconcile faithful adherence to principle and unity with the church they loved: **"After a long and severe conflict, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry. They saw that separation was an absolute necessity if they would obey the word of God. They dared not tolerate errors fatal to their own souls and set an example which would imperil the faith of their children and children's children. To secure peace and unity they were ready to make any concession consistent with fidelity to God; but they felt that even peace would be too dearly purchased at the sacrifice of principle. If unity could be secured only by the compromise of truth and righteousness, then let there be difference, and even war."**

"Well would it be for the church and the world if the principles that actuated those steadfast souls were revived in the hearts of God's professed people. There is an alarming indifference in regard to the doctrines which are the pillars of the Christian faith. The opinion is gaining ground, that, after all, these are not of vital importance. This degeneracy is strengthening the hands of the agents of Satan, so that false theories and fatal delusions which the faithful in ages past imperiled their lives to resist and expose, are now regarded with favor by thousands who claim to be followers of Christ."⁵

Association

What does the Bible say about the way we are influenced by the people or things with which we associate?

"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are

changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

By beholding we become changed.

"Every association we form, however limited, exerts some influence upon us. The extent to which we yield to that influence will be determined by the **degree of intimacy, the constancy of the intercourse, and our love and veneration for the one with whom we associate.** Thus by acquaintance and association with Christ we may become like Him, the one faultless Example."⁶



This also works negatively:

"We are not to associate with the ungodly and partake of their spirit, for they will lead the heart away from God to the worship of false gods. The steadfast soul, firm in the faith, can do much good; he can impart blessings of the highest order to those with whom he associates, for the law of the Lord is in his heart. **But we cannot willingly associate with those who are trampling upon the law of God, and preserve our faith pure and untarnished. We shall catch the spirit, and unless we separate from them, we shall be bound up with them at last, to share their doom.**

"It was by associating with idolaters and joining in their

festivities that the Hebrews were led to transgress God's law and bring His judgments upon the nation. So now it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. . . . God requires of His people now as great a distinction from the world, in customs, habits, and principles, as He required of Israel anciently."⁷

"The warnings given to the Hebrews against assimilating with the heathen were not more direct or explicit than are those forbidding Christians to conform to the spirit and customs of the ungodly. Christ speaks to us, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1 John 2:15). 'The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God' (James 4:4). **The followers of Christ are to separate themselves from sinners, choosing their society only when there is opportunity to do them good. We cannot be too decided in shunning the company of those who exert an influence to draw us away from God.** While we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation,' we are to shun temptation, so far as possible."⁸

This means not going to meetings where error is taught. The servant of the Lord has clarified this question:

"The different parties of professed Advent believers have each a little truth, but God has given all these truths to His children who are being prepared for the day of God. He has also given them truths that none of these parties know, neither will they understand. Things which are sealed up to them, the Lord has opened to those who will see and are ready to understand. If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error.

"I was shown the necessity of those who believe that we are

having the last message of mercy, being separate from those who are daily imbibing new errors. I saw that neither young nor old should attend their meetings; for it is wrong to thus encourage them while they teach error that is a deadly poison to the soul and teach for doctrines the commandments of men. The influence of such gatherings is not good. If God has delivered us from such darkness and error, we should stand fast in the liberty wherewith He has set us free and rejoice in the truth. **God is displeased with us when we go to listen to error, without being obliged to go; for unless He sends us to those meetings where error is forced home to the people by the power of the will, He will not keep us. The angels cease their watchful care over us, and we are left to the buffetings of the enemy, to be darkened and weakened by him and the power of his evil angels; and the light around us becomes contaminated with the darkness.**

"I saw that we have no time to throw away in listening to fables. Our minds should not be thus diverted, but should be occupied with the present truth, and seeking wisdom that we may obtain a more thorough knowledge of our position, that with meekness we may be able to give a reason of our hope from the Scriptures. While false doctrines and dangerous errors are pressed upon the mind, it cannot be dwelling upon the truth which is to fit and prepare the house of Israel to stand in the day of the Lord."⁹

Does this mean no association with the world at all?

"The question may be asked, **Are we to have no union whatever with the world? The word of the Lord is to be our guide. Any connection with infidels and unbelievers which would identify us with them is forbidden by the word.** We are to come out from them and be separate. In no case are we to link ourselves with them in their plans or work.

But we are not to live reclusive lives. We are to do worldlings all the good we possibly can.

Christ has given us an example of this. When invited to eat with publicans and sinners, He did not refuse; for in no other way than by mingling with them could He reach this class. But on every occasion He gave them talents of words and influence. He opened up themes of conversation which brought things of eternal interest to their minds. And this Teacher enjoins us, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). On the temperance question take your position without wavering. Be as firm as a rock. Be not partakers of other men's sins. Acts of dishonesty in business deal, with believers or unbelievers, should be reproved; and if they give no evidence of reformation, come out from among them and be separate."¹⁰

The purpose of God's church

In 1 Timothy 3:15 the apostle Paul refers to the church of the living God as the pillar and ground of the truth. Why? "The word of God is a book of truth. Jesus is a faithful and true witness. **The church is the witness and ground of the truth.**"¹¹

Through the proclamation of the truth we are drawn into His church. "Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church—He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church."¹²

What about faith in Christ? Where do we improve it?

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith,

Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14–17).

Who sends the right preachers? The church, which is organized for service. Because of this important aspect of faith, God is seeking to draw everyone to hear the truth by His preachers in His church.

Jesus explained, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

"All who believe are to be gathered into one church."¹³

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God (Ephesians 3:10)."¹⁴ *R*

References

- ¹ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 31. [Emphasis added.]
- ² *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 400.
- ³ *Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 391. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ⁴ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 306. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ⁵ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 45, 46. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁶ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 222, 223. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁷ *The Adventist Home*, pp. 459, 460. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁸ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 458, 459. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁹ *Early Writings*, pp. 124, 125. [Emphasis added.]
- ¹⁰ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 482, 483. [Emphasis added.]
- ¹¹ *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 336. [Emphasis added.]
- ¹² *Education*, p. 268.
- ¹³ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9. [Emphasis supplied.]

I've heard it several times lately—nature speaks. Referred to as the Lord's largest book, His creation has a very incredible, long-lasting, beautiful, complex yet simple mission to fulfill. Creation was created for the glory of its Creator.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. . . . Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the

seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Genesis 1:1, 31; 2:1-3).

Why did He create the vastness, the detail, the beauty? The heavenly beings declare: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all

things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

"For by Christ [the Son of God] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16, 17).

The Creator assures: "I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in

Nature Speaks:

Are We Listening?

*A Bible and Spirit of Prophecy compilation
with comments by P. J. Stemmler*



the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it" (Isaiah 41:18–20).

"Let the [angels and all creation] praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created" (Psalm 148:5).

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20).

The Creator, Jesus Christ, made all things beautiful to exhibit the character of our God, His Father, and to reveal the spiritual—that we cannot see and touch, through the physical.

"But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" (Job 12:7–9).

We don't think much about it, but we are surrounded by a vast lesson book and we barely even take note of it, much less study its lessons. As I worked on a recent project, I was led to read the first chapter in *Christ's Object Lessons*. It was as if I had never read it before.

"In Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. **Men could learn of the unknown through the**

known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of men. So it was in Christ's teaching: the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.

"The Scripture says, 'All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 13:34, 35). Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of nature and the life-experience of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word. Leading thus from the natural to the spiritual kingdom, Christ's parables are links in the chain of truth that unites man with God, and earth with heaven.

"In His teaching from nature, Christ was speaking of the things which His own hands had made, and which had qualities and powers that He Himself had imparted. In their original perfection all created things were an expression of the thought of God. To Adam and Eve in their Eden home nature was full of the knowledge of God, teeming with divine instruction. Wisdom spoke to the eye and was received into the heart; for they communed with God in His created works. As soon as the holy pair transgressed the law of the Most High, the brightness from the face of God departed from the face of nature. The earth is now marred and defiled by sin. Yet even in its blighted state much that is beautiful remains. God's object lessons are not obliterated; rightly understood, nature speaks of her Creator.

"In the days of Christ these lessons had been lost sight of. Men had well-nigh ceased to discern God in His works. The sinfulness of humanity had cast a pall over the fair face of creation; and instead of manifesting God, His works became a barrier that concealed Him. Men 'worshiped and served the creature more than the

Creator.' Thus the heathen 'became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened' (Romans 1:25, 21). So in Israel, man's teaching had been put in the place of God's. Not only the things of nature, but the sacrificial service and the Scriptures themselves—all given to reveal God—were so perverted that they became the means of concealing Him.

"Christ sought to remove that which obscured the truth. The veil that sin has cast over the face of nature, He came to draw aside, bringing to view the spiritual glory that all things were created to reflect. His words placed the teachings of nature as well as of the Bible in a new aspect, and made them a new revelation.

"Jesus plucked the beautiful lily, and placed it in the hands of children and youth; and as they looked into His own youthful face, fresh with the sunlight of His Father's countenance, He gave the lesson, 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow [in the simplicity of natural beauty]; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' Then followed the sweet assurance and the important lesson, 'Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?'

"In the sermon on the mount these words were spoken to others besides children and youth. They were spoken to the multitude, among whom were men and women full of worries and perplexities, and sore with disappointment and sorrow. Jesus continued: 'Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' Then spreading out His hands to the surrounding multitude, He said, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6:28–33).

“Thus Christ interpreted the message which He Himself had given to the lilies and the grass of the field. He desires us to read it in every lily and every spire of grass. His words are full of assurance and tend to confirm trust in God.

“So wide was Christ’s view of truth, so extended His teaching, **that every phase of nature was employed in illustrating truth.** The scenes upon which the eye daily rests were all connected with some spiritual truth, so **that nature is clothed with the parables of the Master.**

“In the earlier part of His ministry, Christ had spoken to the people in words so plain that all His hearers might have grasped truths which would make them wise unto salvation. But in many hearts the truth had taken no root, and it had been quickly caught away. ‘Therefore speak I to them in parables.’ He said; ‘because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . . For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed’ (Matthew 13:13–15).

“Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. **No more effective method of instruction could He have employed.** If His hearers had desired a knowledge of divine things, they might have understood His words; for He was always willing to explain them to the honest inquirer.

“Again, Christ had truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept or even to understand. For this reason also He taught them in parables. By connecting His teaching with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as they looked upon the objects that

illustrated His lessons, they recalled the words of the divine Teacher. To minds that were open to the Holy Spirit, the significance of the Saviour’s teaching unfolded more and more. Mysteries grew clear, and that which had been hard to grasp became evident.

“Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers. Their interest was aroused by figures drawn from the surroundings of their daily life. None who listened to the Saviour could feel that they were neglected or forgotten. The humblest, the most sinful, heard in His teaching a voice that spoke to them in sympathy and tenderness.

“And He had another reason for teaching in parables. Among the multitudes that gathered about Him, there were priests and rabbis, scribes and elders, Herodians and rulers, world-loving, bigoted, ambitious men, who desired above all things to find some accusation against Him. Their spies followed His steps day after day, to catch from His lips something that would cause His condemnation, and forever silence the One who seemed to draw the world after Him. The Saviour understood the character of these men, and He presented truth in such a way that they could find nothing by which to bring His case before the Sanhedrim. In parables He rebuked the hypocrisy and wicked works of those who occupied high positions, and in figurative language clothed truth of so cutting a character that had it been spoken in direct denunciation, they would not have listened to His words, and would speedily have put an end to His ministry. But while He evaded the spies, He made truth so clear that error was manifested, and the honest in heart were profited by His lessons. Divine wisdom, infinite grace, were made plain by the things of God’s creation. Through nature and the experiences of life, men were taught of God. ‘The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world,’ were

‘perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity’ (Romans 1:20, RV).

“In the Saviour’s parable teaching is an indication of what constitutes the true ‘higher education.’ Christ might have opened to men the deepest truths of science. He might have unlocked mysteries which have required many centuries of toil and study to penetrate. He might have made suggestions in scientific lines that would have afforded food for thought and stimulus for invention to the close of time. But He did not do this. He said nothing to gratify curiosity, or to satisfy man’s ambition by opening doors to worldly greatness. In all His teaching, Christ brought the mind of man in contact with the Infinite Mind. He did not direct the people to study men’s theories about God, His word, or His works. He taught them to behold Him as manifested in His works, in His word, and by His providences.

“Christ did not deal in abstract theories, but in that which is essential to the development of character, that which will enlarge man’s capacity for knowing God, and increase his efficiency to do good. He spoke to men of those truths that relate to the conduct of life, and that take hold upon eternity.

“It was Christ who directed the education of Israel. Concerning the commandments and ordinances of the Lord He said, ‘Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates’ (Deuteronomy 6:7–9). In His own teaching, Jesus showed how this command is to be fulfilled—how the laws and principles of God’s kingdom can be so presented as to reveal their beauty and preciousness. When the Lord was training Israel to be the special representatives of Himself, He

gave them homes among the hills and valleys. In their home life and their religious service they were brought in constant contact with nature and with the word of God. So Christ taught His disciples by the lake, on the mountainside, in the fields and groves, where they could look upon the things of nature by which He illustrated His teachings. And as they learned of Christ, they put their knowledge to use by cooperating with Him in His work.

“So through the creation we are to become acquainted with the Creator. The book of nature is a great lesson book, which in connection with the Scriptures we are to use in teaching others of His character, and guiding lost sheep back to the fold of God. As the works of God are studied, the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind. It is not the conviction that logical reasoning produces; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word are impressed on the heart.

“In these lessons direct from nature, there is a simplicity and purity that makes them of the highest value. All need the teaching to be derived from this source. In itself the beauty of nature leads the soul away from sin and worldly attractions, and toward purity, peace, and God. Too often the minds of students are occupied with men’s theories

and speculations, falsely called science and philosophy. They need to be brought into close contact with nature. Let them learn that creation and Christianity have one God. Let them be taught to see the harmony of the natural with the spiritual. Let everything which their eyes see or their hands handle be made a lesson in character building. Thus the mental powers will be strengthened, the character developed, the whole life ennobled.

“Christ’s purpose in parable teaching was in direct line with the purpose of the Sabbath. God gave to men the memorial of His creative power, that they might discern Him in the works of His hand. The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator. And it was because He desired us to do this that Jesus bound up His precious lessons with the beauty of natural things.

On the holy rest day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature. We should study the Saviour’s parables where He spoke them, in the fields and groves, under the open sky, among the grass and flowers. **As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love.**

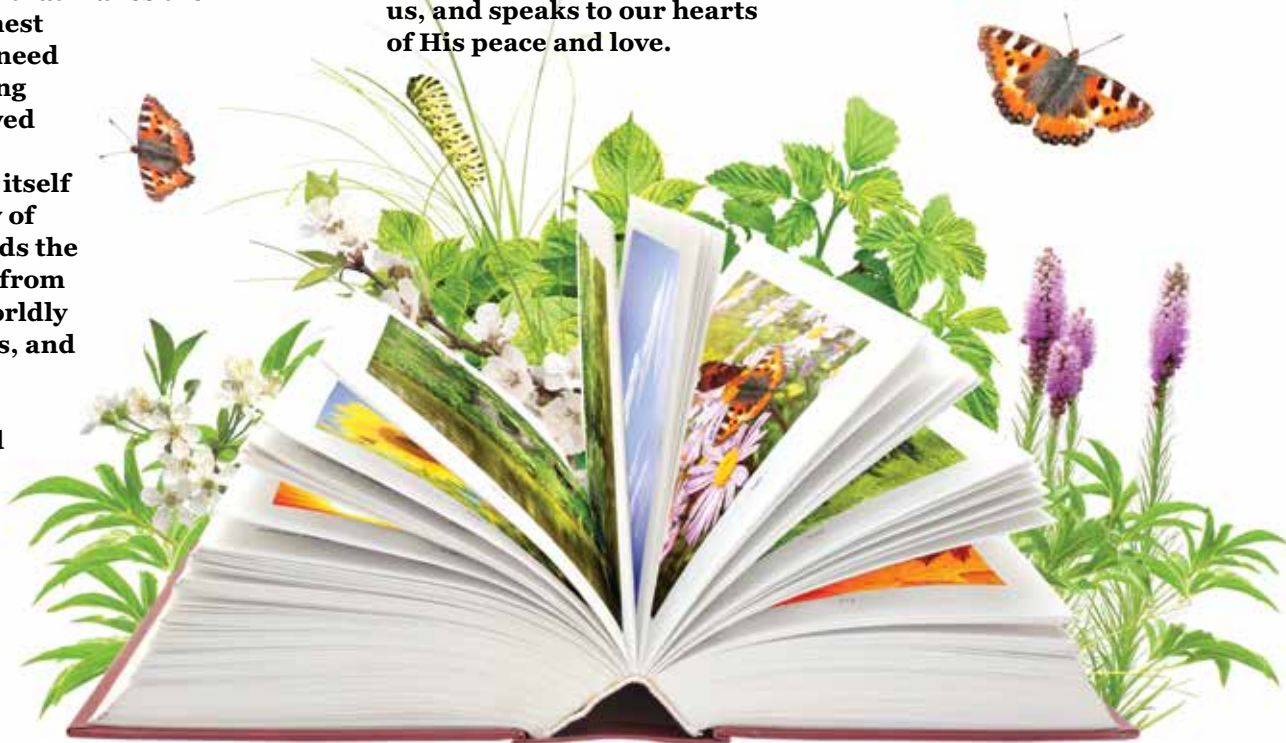
“And Christ has linked His teaching, not only with the day of rest, but with the week of toil. He has wisdom for him who drives the plow and sows the seed. In the plowing and sowing, the tilling and reaping, He teaches us to see an illustration of His work of grace in the heart. So in every line of useful labor and every association of life, He desires us to find a lesson of divine truth. Then our daily toil will no longer absorb our attention and lead us to forget God; it will continually remind us of our Creator and Redeemer. The thought of God will run like a thread of gold through all our homely cares and occupations. For us the glory of His face will again rest upon the face of nature. We shall ever be learning new lessons of heavenly truth, and growing into the image of His purity. Thus shall we ‘be taught of the Lord’; and in the lot wherein we are called, we shall ‘abide with God’ (Isaiah 54:13; 1 Corinthians 7:24).”¹

I am motivated to study more. What about you?

Nature Speaks: Are We Listening? *R*

Reference

¹ *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 17–27.
[Emphasis supplied.]





← Kigali

A week-long seminar was held in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda on January 24–31.

↗ Peru

The 22nd Peruvian Union National Conference was held on January 19–23.

↓ Italy

The Lighthouse Missionary Bible School completed its latest seminar course on Fundamental Bible Truths from December 23, 2015 to January 6, 2016.



Romania ⇨

About 500 church members and visitors attended a youth camp meeting at the church's retreat property in Porumbacu, Sibiu, on December 24–28, 2015

Ecuador ⇩

New members were added to our church family in Ecuador on March 5, 2016.

USA ⇩

The church in Los Angeles, California held a spiritual conference and its musicians recorded the Hallelujah Chorus on January 15-17.



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MOVING? Please let us know.

Job the Winner

Have you ever had a pet that you really, really loved? Maybe it was a dog or cat, a bird, a turtle, a rabbit, or even a fish. It is so very sad to lose even one little animal we dearly love!

There was once a man who lived many years ago. His name was Job. He had not only one animal—but he actually had 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 donkeys, and 500 pairs of oxen.

Not only that. He was blessed with 7 sons and 3 daughters. You can imagine how much he had tenderly cared for those 10 children until they were fully grown.

Not only was Job blessed with riches and a big family—he also was famous and admired by many. The Bible says he was the greatest of all the men in the east—and we know that the Orient has a lot of people in it!

But what happened one day? The Bible tells us that Satan hated Job and tried to say that Job was faithful to God only because God was so good to him. So Satan was allowed to attack poor Job.

All of a sudden, tremendous disasters came. Job's animals were destroyed and all of his children were killed.

Not only that! Job got a terrible sickness. Painful boils popped up on his skin, all over his entire body. They really hurt!

These problems did not go away. . . .

Then, some men came to see Job. They were supposed to be close friends who were worried

about him. But most of what they said to Job was that he must have been really, really bad to have to be punished so hard.

Was that true? The Bible says that it was not. Job was a very faithful man who loved God and obeyed Him. Now he was all alone in trusting the Lord. Even his wife had given up hope.

Things were looking very sad, indeed. But did Job complain? No. He decided to trust in God no matter what happened to him. That is real faith!

So, what did Job end up doing? He prayed for himself as a helpless sinner in God's sight—and for his friends. Yes, those friends who seemed to think they were so good and Job was so bad. After all, Job had been rich and now he was poor. His beloved children had been swept away. He used to have good health and now he just sat on the ground, hurting, and looking horrible.

But Job prayed for those friends. Why? They needed prayer! Everyone does! Job was so unselfish that he prayed for them, even though they were being very proud and unfair to him.

Finally, guess what happened? God healed Job from all the boils. Not only that, He gave him twice as many animals as he had before, plus 7 more sons and 3 more daughters. Amazing! Maybe this took time, but God is very faithful.

So, the next time you are tempted to complain about something bad that has happened to you, think of Job. It may be an attack from Satan, but if you trust God no matter what, He will take care of you and give you a greater blessing than before. Winners trust Him!—BHM.

