

the REFORMATION *herald*

Vol. 58, No. 1



True Worship



Repentance | Obedience & Righteousness by Faith | Service & Thankfulness

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

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Our Need for True Worship

Worship is essential for salvation. It includes repentance, confession, prayer, praise, thanksgiving, good works, and obedience. It doesn't mean that we earn salvation in exchange for these elements. But in those who surrender their life to Christ, the Holy Spirit produces these elements of adoration.

Worship is due only to God. When Satan demanded worship from Christ, the Saviour declared: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10).

When John, the prophet, was tempted to worship Gabriel, this powerful angel said to him:

"See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God" (Revelation 19:10).

E. G. White clarifies the issue when she says: "Christ, our Mediator, and the Holy Spirit are constantly interceding in man's behalf, but the Spirit pleads not for us as does Christ, who presents His blood, shed from the foundation of the world; **the Spirit works upon our hearts, drawing out prayers and penitence, praise and thanksgiving.** The gratitude which flows from our lips is

the result of the Spirit's striking the cords of the soul in holy memories, awakening the music of the heart.

"The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God's right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned.

"Oh, that all may see that everything in obedience, in penitence, in praise and thanksgiving, must be placed upon the glowing fire of the

righteousness of Christ. The fragrance of this righteousness ascends like a cloud around the mercy seat."¹

The Lord's messenger calls these elements **religious services** which are produced in the hearts of true believers. However, passing through sinful human channels as we are, the entire service is polluted. Another element is essential—the intercession of Christ, who purifies everything with His precious blood, and adds the incense of His imputed righteousness. Then our worship is accepted and we receive gracious answers.

In this issue of *The Reformation Herald*, these important elements are presented. When we keep our communion with the Lord, the Holy Spirit produces acceptable praise, prayer, contrition, repentance, and obedience.

We have nothing of which to boast. Our full salvation depends on the Lord from the beginning to the end. Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last and the Best. Let us keep looking to Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Reference

¹ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 344. [Emphasis added.]

True Worship

by D. P. Silva

What is the religious ceremony known as the “mass”? If you put this question to a sincere, devout Catholic person many of them will not be able to give you a meaningful answer.

But let’s ask ourselves a similar question: What is worship? When we go to different dictionaries, we find a variety of definitions—which in some cases do not help much. In reality, the dictionary follows whatever the people understand about the meaning of words.

In His dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Christ said to her: “You Samaritans worship what you do not know” (John 4:22) Holman Bible. Like the Samaritans of old, there are millions of people today who worship something they do not know.

For some people, worshipping means to go to church, attend the main meetings, socialize, return home and repeat this schedule regularly or irregularly.

I remember a trip I made to Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the 1990’s. Sitting next to me in the airplane, there was a young lady with whom I started a religious dialogue. When I asked her if she knew the Bible, she told me that she used to

attend the Armenian Church, but the priests would conduct the ceremonies in the old Armenian language. Thus, the younger generation, including those such as herself, couldn’t understand the message—but they respected the meetings. Like that young lady, there are millions who just respect what happens in the church but they do not understand what is going on.

What is the real meaning of true worship?

True worship has much to do with our eternal salvation, so it is more

than worth it for us to have a clear understanding about this subject!

In the first angel’s message, we find the divine command: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Revelation 14:7, emphasis supplied).

Worshipping relates to the acknowledgment that God is the Creator of “heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” If He is the Creator of the universe, then we are under the sacred obligation to live and do all under His control.

The renowned William Temple once said: “The world can be saved by one thing and that is worship. For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

The Hebrew word most often translated as “worship” is *shachah*, and the Greek word is *proskuneo*. Both words indicate to prostrate oneself in reverence or bow one’s self down in homage and adoration. In order to be truly genuine, this type of

submission should be accompanied by a lifestyle in harmony with it.

What about counterfeits?

The Bible talks about effective worship and about vain worship.

In His rebuke to the Pharisees because they put their own tradition above God's law, Christ quoted the word of God through the prophet Isaiah explaining in what consists vain worship:

“Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Isaiah 29:13). And then Christ added the words: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

In these Scriptures, we find some characteristics of false and vain worship:

- Worship just by mouth and lips without the heart;
- Worship based on the commandments of men (or human traditions).

What distinguishes true worship?

Going back to the dialogue between Christ and the Samaritan woman, He said to her: “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23, 24).

“Not by seeking a holy mountain or a sacred temple are men brought into communion with heaven. Religion is not to be confined to external forms and ceremonies. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true

worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit every sincere prayer is indited, and such prayer is acceptable to God. Wherever a soul reaches out after God, there the Spirit's working is manifest, and God will reveal Himself to that soul. For such worshippers He is seeking. He waits to receive them, and to make them His sons and daughters.”¹

This whole paragraph is worthy of serious analysis:

- We cannot be in communion with God by seeking a holy mountain or a sacred temple;
- Worship doesn't depend on external forms or ceremonies;
- True religion is that one which comes from God;
- Before worshipping God, we need to be born again;
- We can worship God only if we know and love Him, resulting in willing obedience to His will.

This is true worship. It is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer.

Then we can understand why Abel and his offering were accepted by the Lord—and Cain and his offering were rejected. The first submitted himself fully to God and His instructions. The second did everything according to his own mind and will, rejecting God's plan of salvation.

The same principles explain why the worship of the publican was fully accepted by the Lord, while the worship of the Pharisee was totally rejected. The first recognized his own sinfulness and need, and submitted himself to the mercy of God. The second, trusting in his own “merits,” offered a prayer full of spiritual pride and self-righteousness.

Let us examine God's word and ourselves to see if we are following God's plan for true worship or if we are following commandments of men. May the Lord bless us and make us able to worship Him “in spirit and in truth”!

What does it mean to worship “in spirit and in truth”?

When we are worshipping God, we are to be confessing His worthiness or “worthwhileness” above everything else we know. When we do this sincerely, we are not playing a game or going through some kind of mere outward show to impress or deceive.

When we worship “in spirit,” our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength are engaged in the action.

When we worship “in truth,” we are not lying to ourselves or to anyone else about what we are doing. We really believe with all of our heart—and by faith are engaged in a genuine, meaningful, victorious experience.

“

**Before worshipping God,
we need to be born
again.”**

“Faithful work is more acceptable to God than the most zealous and thought-to-be holiest worship. It is working together with Christ that is true worship. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree.

“Pure religion and undefiled before the Father is this: ‘To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.’ Good deeds are the fruit that Christ requires us to bear: kind words, deeds of benevolence, of tender regard for the poor, the needy, the afflicted. When hearts sympathize with hearts burdened with discouragement and grief, when the hand dispenses to the needy, when the naked are clothed, the stranger made welcome



to a seat in your parlor and a place in your heart, angels are coming very near, and an answering strain is responded to in heaven. Every act of justice, mercy, and benevolence makes melody in heaven. The Father from His throne beholds those who do these acts of mercy, and numbers them with His most precious treasures. 'And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.' Every merciful act to the needy, the suffering, is regarded as though done to Jesus. When you succor the poor, sympathize with the afflicted and oppressed, and befriend the orphan, you bring yourselves into a closer relationship to Jesus."²

"The holiness of [Christ's] character is reflected by all who serve Him in spirit and in truth."³

What about when we are in the house of God?

"Those who assemble to worship [God] should put away every evil thing. Unless they worship Him in spirit and truth and in the beauty of holiness, their coming together will be of no avail."⁴

"Sometimes young men and women have so little reverence for the house and worship of God that they keep up a continual communication with each other during the sermon. Could these see the angels of God

looking upon them and marking their doings, they would be filled with shame, with abhorrence of themselves. God wants attentive hearers. It was while men slept that Satan sowed his tares.

"When the benediction is pronounced, all should still be quiet, as if fearful of losing the peace of Christ. Let all pass out without jostling or loud talking, feeling that they are in the presence of God, that His eye is resting upon them, and that they must act as in His visible presence. Let there be no stopping in the aisles to visit or gossip, thus blocking them up so that others cannot pass out. The precincts of the church should be invested with

a sacred reverence. It should not be made a place to meet old friends and visit and introduce common thoughts and worldly business transactions. These should be left outside the church. God and angels have been dishonored by the careless, noisy laughing and shuffling of feet heard in some places.

“Parents, elevate the standard of Christianity in the minds of your children; help them to weave Jesus into their experience; teach them to have the highest reverence for the house of God and to understand that when they enter the Lord’s house it should be with hearts that are softened and subdued by such thoughts as these: ‘God is here; this is His house. I must have pure thoughts and the holiest motives. I must have no pride, envy, jealousy, evil surmising, hatred, or deception in my heart, for I am coming into the presence of the holy God. This is the place where God meets with and blesses His people. The high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity looks upon me, searches my heart, and reads the most secret thoughts and acts of my life.’”⁵

Extra blessings in God’s presence

“When you meet with the Lord, say, I am in the Lord’s house, and I desire all wicked thoughts, all mistrust and murmuring against my brethren to be banished. We have met here with God, who ‘so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ This is our privilege, and we desire to come into the house of God with thanksgiving. We ask the Lord to remove from our hearts every thing that is evil, that we may bring to the house of God that which He can bless.

“Let every church member kneel before God while in His temple, and consecrate to him His own, which He has bought with the blood of Christ. Pray for the speaker. Pray that great blessing may come to the one who is

to hold forth the bread of life. Strive earnestly to lay hold of a blessing for yourself. Cry unto God, Increase my faith, Make me understand Thy word: for the entrance of Thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. Refresh me by Thy presence. Fill my heart with thy love, that in possessing so great a treasure, I may love my brethren as Christ loved me.



The precincts of the church should be invested with a sacred reverence.”

“God will bless all who will thus prepare themselves for His service. They will understand what it means to have the assurance of the Spirit, because they have received Christ by faith. The religion of Christ means much more than the forgiveness of sin. It means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ. We need the vital qualities of Christianity, and when we possess them, the church will be a living, active, working church. There will be a growth in grace, because the bright rays of the Sun of righteousness pervade the chambers of the mind.

“Let us not bring the gloom of unbelief into the church. Let us trim our lamps, seeking a fresh supply of oil, before we step over the threshold. It is our right, our privilege, to dismiss gloomy depression. As we go to the house of worship, we may go with joyfulness; for are we not going to meet with God and His people?

“Christ welcomed little children to His presence. He was cheered by the simplicity of their faith. Let us become as little children, that in simplicity of faith we may welcome Christ and be welcomed by Him. Sing to the Lord with the Spirit and the understanding. Let no thought of criticism enter your mind, to torment you; for Satan is near. He will do this work without your help. Refuse to cooperate with the accuser of the brethren. Gather up every ray of light, then seek out those who need help, and give this light to them. God says, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.’”⁶

Worshipping in the beauty of holiness

“Praise the Lord, all ye saints. Be glad in the Lord. Praise His holy name. We must carry to every religious gathering a quickened spiritual consciousness that God and the angels are there, cooperating with all true worshipers. We do not obtain one hundredth part of what we should from assembling together to worship God. Our perceptive faculties need sharpening. Fellowship with one another should make us glad. Why, with such a hope as we have, are our hearts not aglow with the love of God?

“When we are tempted to murmur or complain at something some one has done, praise something in that person. Say, ‘Satan, I have defeated your temptations this time.’ Cultivate the habit of thankfulness. Praise God over and over again for His wonderful love in giving Christ to die for us. It never pays to think of old grievances. God calls upon us to cultivate His mercy and His matchless love, that we may be inspired with praise.”⁷

References

- ¹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189. [Emphasis supplied].
- ² *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 24, 25.
- ³ *The Faith I Live By*, p. 189.
- ⁴ *The Review and Herald*, December 22, 1896.
- ⁵ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 493, 494.
- ⁶ *Bible Training School*, October 1, 1908.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*

Prayer

An Important Ingredient in Christian Life

by G. Serban

Many times in my childhood I grappled with questions such as, “What does it mean to pray?” “Why should I pray?” “What should I say in prayer?” “Is there someone to listen to and answer my prayers?” At that time I didn’t understand very much. But whenever I neglected to pray I would feel insecure all day long—as if somehow I was in some kind of danger. Then I tried to understand why I felt safe after I had made my personal prayer. And God answered me—allowing me to understand that prayer is like a phone call you make to someone you trust, like calling your dad and letting him know where you are for him to come and pick you up. If you call him, no matter whether it is raining, snowing, or late at night, you are sure that he will come and pick you up right away. But if you fail to call him—and just assume that he must somehow guess exactly when you’ll finish your classes, you will feel insecure. He might come right away, but are you sure about it? Every minute then seems like hours. Perhaps your imagination will lead you to feel as if you’re being hunted, or like someone is spying on you and waiting for a chance to hurt you.

Prayer is the channel of communication between our soul and God. It “is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known

to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”¹

“Prayer is the breath of the soul, the secret of spiritual power. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically now and then as it seems convenient—and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor.”²

“The Lord gives us the privilege of seeking Him individually in earnest prayer, or unburdening our souls to Him, keeping nothing from Him who has invited us, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28).”³

Keeping in touch with the Almighty

Back in Eden, the first pair had the privilege of meeting daily with the heavenly Father. They were talking to Him as we do to a friend today. By transgression, this privilege was restricted a bit. If before they were able to share with Him about everything they would do, everything they would need, face-to-face—now they were able to talk to Him only by voice without seeing Him anymore. Since that time sin continues to separate us from God more and more, and to the same degree that sin corrupts and taints humanity—that sin unfits us to be able to come into the presence of

God. Day by day humanity plunges more deeply into evil and would have remained so forever had not God especially interposed. We are full of sin, but we are able to come to God and ask for mercy and forgiveness with holy boldness—overcoming the fear of being guilty, because we have Christ as our mediator. Through His own merits, Christ has bridged the gulf which sin had made, so that the ministering angels can hold communion with humanity. Christ connects us—in our weakness and helplessness—with the Source of infinite power. If our petition comes from a very sincere heart and we pray in His name, even when we don’t know what words to use in prayer, Jesus will arrange that petition in a very pleasing way that is fragrant with His incense—so that our prayer is acceptable to our Father.

“Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us. But these are not enough; we need also to pour out our hearts to Him. . . . In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life.”⁴

“When Jesus was upon the earth, He taught His disciples how to pray. He directed them to present their daily needs before God, and to cast all their care upon Him. And the assurance He gave them that their petitions should be heard, is assurance also to us.

“Jesus Himself, while He dwelt among men, was often in prayer. Our Saviour identified Himself with our needs and weakness, in that He became a suppliant, a petitioner, seeking from His Father fresh supplies of strength, that He might come forth braced for duty and trial. . . . And if the Saviour of men, the Son of God, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of fervent, constant prayer.”⁵

“Pray in your closet, and as you go about your daily labor let your heart be often uplifted to God. It was thus that Enoch walked with God. These silent prayers rise like precious incense before the throne of grace. Satan cannot overcome him whose heart is thus stayed upon God.

“There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God and plead for divine guidance, as did Nehemiah when he made his request before King Artaxerxes. A closet of communion may be found wherever we are. We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul.”⁶

Why is it so hard to us to kneel down in prayer?

To say “I’m sorry” is the most difficult sentence in the world. It seems easy, but the gravity of the guilt we feel impedes us from coming to God. Talking to a friend is not hard, but when we know we have disappointed that friend, then it gets harder to talk with him or her. Whenever we see that person, we tend to try to turn away just to avoid meeting face-to-face. So with Jesus, it sometimes seems easier to avoid Him than admit we have disappointed Him.

Here Satan acts his role as well. The devil comes to discourage us just as he did in heaven with the angels. He flaunts in our face the gravity of the sin we did and tells us that we went too far to be able to be forgiven anymore. But the Word of God teaches us that when we feel so weak—as we are with no mediator—then that is the exact moment to kneel down. At that moment we should begin to pray and ask God to save us. We must look to Christ, our only hope. At those moments He is so much closer to us than other times! And if necessary, He is ready to send all the angels needed to aid us if we are pleading for His sustaining grace.

Overcoming the enemy of our souls through faithful prayer

To negotiate with the evil one and think somehow you’ll be the winner is to deceive yourself. Satan always will be the winner if you trust in your own strength. A teacher from our missionary school used to say, “I trust you, but I don’t trust the devil.” The archenemy knows us better than we do, and when we think we have finally won the victory, he comes to us with the temptation that he knows we like—and designs it in a perfect way so that we can’t say no to it. It may be music, cars, fashion, video games, or any temptation—any other thing that we like and we focus on it more than we do on God. He’s got enough experience to tempt us at that moment and he knows how to deal with people of all ages, young and old. First, it may seem like a new experience to us, but after we repeat

it for some time we become addicted to it and we cannot seem to imagine life without it. And getting used to it, you’ll soon feel like there is nothing wrong in doing so anymore. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8), and if it is possible, he will deceive the very elect.

If you’re dealing with this and



feel devoid of strength—and you begin to think there is no way for you to come out of this situation, remember that Jesus invites us to come unto Him and receive rest for our souls. The Bible teaches us that certain types of evil “can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). Try to choose one day per week for a specific time and set it aside for prayer and fasting. It is our privilege to come to God with holy boldness. At first this will be hard. Satan will come to tempt us as he did with Jesus in the wilderness. He knew that Jesus had been fasting and praying for a long time—so he knew that Christ was probably very hungry. At that moment he came to share with Him some ideas about where and how He could get some food.

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... he recently told my grandmother that ever since we prayed for him that day, **he has never smoked again . . .**”

I remember when I first tried to fast. . . . I am not used to eating on the Sabbath mornings, but on that very Sabbath when I had told myself I would fast, suddenly I felt hungrier than usual and I couldn't resist the temptation! But by praying more, I obtained more strength from above and—by fasting I received power to control my whole body with my brain. The brain is the only place where Satan has no access—and then he tries to control us through other parts of the body.

Another way to overcome the idols in our heart is through the power

of group prayer. I remember a few years ago, a neighbor stopped by our church on a Sabbath morning during our divine service. He waited till we finished the worship and then he asked us to pray for him. He told us that he had been trying for a long time to quit smoking. All the various ways he had tried to quit had achieved no results. And he really believed that if we would pray for him specifically according to his temptation he would gain enough strength to quit. He never returned to church after that (at least not yet), but he recently told my grandmother that ever since we prayed for him that day, he has never smoked again and he wanted to thank everyone in the church for praying for him.

“Satan knows better than God's people the power that they can have over him, when their strength is in Christ. When they humbly entreat the mighty Conqueror for help, the weakest believer in the truth, relying firmly upon Christ, can successfully repulse Satan and all his host.”⁷

As we sincerely ask God to help us to loose the bands of evil, He will hear and answer us. But we must live in harmony with our prayers. They are of no avail if we walk contrary to them. We will not be able to resist temptations by fasting and praying if at the same time we continue to abide in the midst of them. Loose the bands of evil and “resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Peter 5:9).

Biblical reasons to pray

Answered prayers are cause for praise and thanksgiving. We often think that to pray means to ask—to beg—God about everything we need. Many times we seek the Lord when we are in trouble or when we are sick. We go to pray to Him more than Daniel used to pray, we become the most sincere Christians in the world. But when everything goes all right with us, we forget about God, about everything. There are many reasons to give thanks and praise God if we look around us to the things that the

Lord is supplying to us each and every day. Don't forget to thank God for the answered prayers and continue your relationship with Him even if you think “now I am healthy again and I don't need God anymore.” Praise God for the sun that every day provides us enough light and heat; praise Him for the fresh air you are breathing; and praise Him for the beautiful sound of the birds that come to your window and sing for free. All of these seem to be insignificant things—but did you ever think of how kind and generous God is to do things like this for us day by day?

“The change we need is a change of heart, and can only be obtained by seeking God individually for His blessing, by pleading with Him for His power, by fervently praying that His grace may come upon us, and that our characters may be transformed.”⁸

“Every day you should learn something new from the Scriptures. Search them as for hid treasures, for they contain the words of eternal life. Pray for wisdom and understanding to comprehend these holy writings. If you would do this you would find new glories in the word of God; you would feel that you had received new and precious light on subjects connected with the truth, and the Scriptures would be constantly receiving a new value in your estimation.”⁹

Pray as you study, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18)!

“Strive earnestly for unity. Pray for it, work for it. It will bring spiritual health, elevation of thought, nobility of character, heavenly-mindedness, enabling you to overcome selfishness and evil surmisings, and to be more than conquerors through Him that loved you and gave Himself for you. Crucify self; esteem others better than yourselves. Thus you will be brought into oneness with Christ. Before the heavenly universe, and before the church and the world, you will bear unmistakable evidence that you are God's sons and daughters. God will be glorified in the example that you set.”¹⁰

“Do you pray for the advancement of the truth? Then work for it, and show that your prayers rise from sincere and earnest hearts. God does not work miracles where He has provided means by which the work may be accomplished. Use your time and talents in His service, and He will not fail to work with your efforts.”¹¹

Why do we sometimes experience unanswered prayers?

“We are so erring and short-sighted that we sometimes ask for things that would not be a blessing to us, and our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us that which will be for our highest good—that which we ourselves would desire if with vision divinely enlightened we could see all things as they really are. When our prayers seem not to be answered, we are to cling to the promise; for the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. But to claim that prayer will always be answered in the very way and for the particular thing that we desire, is presumption. God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly. Then do not fear to trust Him, even though you do not see the immediate answer to your prayers. Rely upon His sure promise, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you.’ ”¹²

God, as any earthly father does, has the right to analyze our requests. If a father thinks that what his son has asked him is not a wise request, or if he sees his son not behaving the way he is being told, the request may be denied. The heavenly Father has the same right to analyze our requests. His answer may be, “Not yet,” “Not the way you want,” “a little bit different,” or His answer may be “Yes.” But am I ready to accept a negative answer as well? There is a dual condition in fulfilling the promise that all we ask in Christ’s name shall be given to us: Jesus says, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

“If we regard iniquity in our hearts, if we cling to any known sin, the Lord will not hear us; but the prayer of the penitent, contrite soul is always accepted. When all known wrongs are righted, we may believe that God will answer our petitions.”¹³

“

... to claim that prayer will always be answered in the very way and for the particular thing that we desire, is presumption.”

Conclusion

Prayer is a powerful weapon in the Christian’s hand. It is the key that opens the heavenly treasures for us and is a faster means of communication than even the most sophisticated state-of-the-art technology of today would ever be able to perform. I’ve experienced being alone on a new continent, far away from family and friends, and finding myself with no support. Then, in less than a second, I’ve made a “call” to God to ask for His guidance and protection. From that instant, I start feeling as if I’ve lived there forever. We still don’t understand

what prayer means; we even don’t take advantage of this privilege as much as we could. Usually we only think about it when we are in trouble. But imagine how powerful we’ll be if we pray without ceasing as Jesus has told us!

“Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to meditation and prayer and to the study of the Scriptures will be connected with heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them. . . . Their earnest prayers will enter into that within the veil. This class will have a sanctified boldness to come into the presence of the Infinite One. They will feel that heaven’s light and glories are for them, and they will become refined, elevated, ennobled by this intimate acquaintance with God. Such is the privilege of true Christians.”¹⁴

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Repentance

by L. Tudoroiu

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and **sin no more** (John 8:10, emphasis added).

Repentance is a **reverse process that is the opposite of straying away** from the will of God. Repentance **is a painful state of human mind**, when people realize the enormity of their sins. Repentance **is the attitude of abhorring self** and the actions that produced separation from God. Repentance **is the work of the Holy Spirit**, the deeply profound refining process of the human mind that will redirect, link, and commit the mind to God as the sovereign of the human temple.

“Those who consecrate their lives to the service of God will live with Him through the ceaseless ages of eternity. . . .

“‘And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads’ (Revelation 22:4). **Their minds were given to God in this world;** they served Him with their heart and

intellect, and now He can put His name in their foreheads.”¹

Repentance is the presence of Jesus in the life of the sinner. Repentance is abhorring sin. Repentance is a sentence: “Go and sin no more.” Repentance is reconciliation with God.

Repentance can be **expressed verbally**, such as in the case of Zacchaeus: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8).

There is a valuable lesson about repentance in the stories of the heroes of the Bible. We can ask the question: Why did God allow to be written in the Holy Word actions or sins that are so abhorrent to Him?

The adultery, murder, and other sins of Bible heroes are an embarrassment to men and an insult to God.

Let us learn from the repentance of David, as he prayed:

“‘I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I

not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. . . . Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance’ (Psalm 32:5–7).

“Many have murmured at what they called God’s injustice in sparing David, whose guilt was so great, after having rejected Saul for what appear to them to be far less flagrant sins. But David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence.

“This passage in David’s history is full of significance to the repenting sinner. It is one of the most forcible illustrations given us of the struggles and temptations of humanity, and of genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. **Through all the ages it has proved a source of encouragement to souls that, having fallen into sin, were struggling under the burden**

of their guilt. Thousands of the children of God, who have been betrayed into sin, when ready to give up to despair have remembered how David's sincere repentance and confession were accepted by God, notwithstanding he suffered for his transgression; and **they also have taken *courage to repent* and try again to walk in the way of God's commandments.**"²

One thing I know: Those Bible heroes who had the boldness to sin, by the grace of God also found the courage to repent. And here the story of the sinners that will be in heaven—sons and daughters of God—begins; they stopped sinning in this world and allowed Jesus to do in them the reverse of the work of sin—to work out in them the will of our Heavenly Father.

Samson repented without eyes, David without four sons, Lot without his wife, you, I, and others perhaps without our right hand or left leg. But in the kingdom of God, all are at the feet of Jesus. In picturing eternity, how amazing it is to realize that "nearest the throne are those who were once zealous in the cause of Satan, but who, plucked as brands from the burning, have followed their Saviour with deep, intense devotion. Next are those who perfected Christian characters in the midst of falsehood and infidelity, those who honored the law of God when the Christian world declared it void, and the millions, of all ages, who were martyred for their faith. And beyond is the 'great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,' "before the throne,

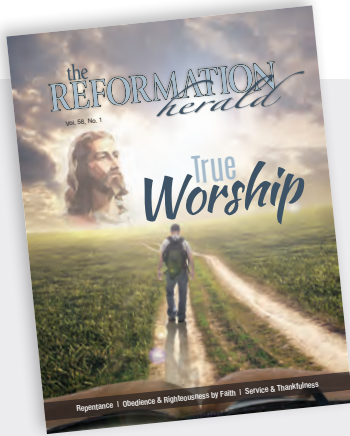
and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands' (Revelation 7:9). Their warfare is ended, their victory won. They have run the race and reached the prize. The palm branch in their hands is a symbol of their triumph, the white robe an emblem of the spotless righteousness of Christ which now is theirs."³

When I was a young man, around 16 or 17 years old, I found myself educated in a school of atheism—culturally negating the existence of God. I realized that I was alone in an infinite universe. I did not know what to do with it. I had questions without answers; my life without God was not a bed of roses by any means. I read books (in those days there was no Facebook or internet) and every book had its own hero, good or bad. I grew

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Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit, the deeply profound refining process of the human mind that will redirect, link and commit the mind to God . . . ”

accustomed to synthesizing plots and concepts, till one day I came home and remembered that an old man had given me a New Testament “Pocket Version Bible.” When I started to read the book I was alone in the house. As I proceeded to go through the book of Matthew, I was pierced in the heart by a plot that was new to me and that lit a fire, very unique in essence, inside of me. Jesus—what a character, what



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a man, what a God, what a Saviour, what a Friend! I had never seen myself in such a contrasted light—with an ugly character, miserable, unworthy to live, grotesque. I abhorred myself for the first time; I believed sincerely that there was no greater sinner than I. Then I started to think: “It’s too good to be true.” I want that, too! That life of devotion, that life of Jesus as a character—gentle, longsuffering, patient. I was overwhelmed with the desire to embrace the character of this “MAN, JESUS CHRIST.” As I was comparing myself with the Lord, I said (like Paul the apostle) “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

Looking back to very specific instances of my life, I began hating myself for the way I used to live. I could not trust my tears, neither my words. I realized deep in my heart that the saving quality of love, in the purest sense, can be found only in Jesus Christ. Then I prayed with tears and I implored God to change my life. I received the gift of repentance from Him and my life gradually has changed. I have been in touch with the Lord every day, and in the night, communing with my dearest Saviour. Every sin has been in conflict with Jesus, and for every single temptation or bad habit Jesus has fought for my freedom.

Finally, it was movies. I was watching TV, and after that I was praying because the Holy Spirit was working in my heart, bringing deep regrets, terrible sentiments of unworthiness, while on my knees scenes or images from the movies were following my eyes. Jesus was giving me the victory slowly but surely. It’s not easy. Will power is given by Jesus. The deepest regrets were generated by the fact that I had hurt the One whom I loved supremely. The separation that sin would make between me and Jesus was unbearable, I could not stand to be away from the Lord and still I did not have the power to overcome.

Then came “Spiderman.” It was the first time that in Romania, a Communist country, the movie “Spiderman” was being played. Most of my classmates missed their last two classes and went to see “Spiderman.” I was alone in the bus station and over 30 students were trying to persuade me to come with them to see the movie. For the first time, Jesus came so vivid in my heart and I felt mercy, pity, and compassion for the Lord. I said in my heart, “Jesus, I am not going to leave You alone again, You are my Friend—the best, the only One, and I will stay with You.” The bus left with my classmates making signs with their hands and faces. I stayed back, alone with my Jesus; crying happily, that in my heart, I still was with the Lord.

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I realized deep in my heart that the saving quality of love, in the purest sense, can be found only in Jesus Christ.”

Today I regret, I repent, for the wasted time I spent before the TV. I have a life to live; now I do not watch movies—I read books. I talk to the Lord and I am happy. Repentance is a gift; you can have it. It’s yours by faith; you look to the pleasure of such a life with Jesus and that life is so desirable that the only question you have in your mind is: Who will give me the **will power** to say NO to SIN?

Grasp the promises of the Lord,
let the repentance and forgiveness be
the gift from the Lord Jesus Christ
for you. Look at Him and live, poor
sinner; look and live.

“It is **not** now the work of the
sinner to **make peace** with God,
but to accept Christ as his
peace and righteousness. Thus
man becomes one with Christ and
one with God. There is no way
by which the heart may be made
holy, save through faith in Christ.
Yet many think that repentance is
a kind of preparation which men
must originate themselves before
they can come to Christ. They must
take steps themselves in order
to find Christ a mediator in their
behalf. It is true that there must be
repentance before there is pardon,
but the sinner must come to Christ
before he can find repentance.
It is **the virtue of Christ** that
strengthens and **enlightens** the
soul, so that repentance may be godly
and **acceptable**.... **Repentance** is
certainly a **gift** of Jesus Christ as is
forgiveness of sins. **Repentance**
cannot be experienced without
Christ, for it is the repentance of
which He is the author that is the
ground upon which we may apply for
pardon. . . . It is through **the work**
of the Holy Spirit that men are led
to repentance. It is from Christ that
the grace of contrition comes,
as well as **the gift of pardon**, and
repentance as well as forgiveness
of sins is procured only through
the atoning blood of Christ. Those
whom God pardons He first makes
penitent.”⁴

May the Lord help us to accept
these tremendous gifts available to us!
Amen.

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- ¹ *The Youth's Instructor*, August 20, 1896.
[Emphasis added.]
- ² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 726. [Emphasis
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- ⁴ *That I May Know Him*, p. 109. [Emphasis
added.]

Sleep or Be Saved?

*Some think our actions matter not,
For our salvation has been bought.
It's true—our works are not a “pass”;
We're saved by grace, as Jesus taught.*

*The only route to heav'nly bliss
Is through the Saviour's own shed blood;
It gains the prize for all who win
'Midst foes attacking as a flood.*

*But does God see inside our heart?
Does He behold pollution there?
Oh yes, indeed, He knows each thought,
Our every motive is laid bare.*

*He sees the depth of all our claims;
His omnipresence will not budge.
So thus He says, yes, saved by faith
But of our works He'll be the Judge.*

*This world is near its very end,
There're souls in darkness to be won.
Our actions now are being watched—
Repenting or just having fun?*

*Passive, lazy we can't be—
Salvation is not child's play.
The hour has come to stand as men—
For Jesus, let us seize the day!*

*All that mental clutter stashed
And all that pile of human pride
Must melt away at Calvary's cross
As we behold His wounded side.*

*There's no more time to sleep on guard;
From slumber we must now awake
To find the wandering souls so lost:
And take the cross, for Jesus' sake!*

—BHM

The Confession of Sin

by B. Montrose

The Old Testament “hand”

According to Strong’s Concordance, the idea of confession in the Old Testament is usually translated from the Hebrew root word “*yad*,” which literally depicts a hand—typically an open hand implying power, authority, or direction. The only other O.T. word indicating confession is from the Hebrew word “*towdah*,” similarly referring to an extension of the hand.

Our proud human nature tends to be repulsed by the idea of confession as somehow being a sign of weakness. But here in contrast we see the actual picture—that strength and courage are included in the noble act of confession.

The first example in Scripture of the actual word, “confess” is found in Leviticus chapter 5—whereby confession for sin was made together with a trespass offering for the wrongdoing. It was an action performed, not a passive experience. Like the ancient Hebrews, if we are serious about our faith, we will not rest passively with regard to this important subject.

The Lord has given His people the assurance, “If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land” (Leviticus 26:40–42). Thus confession is essential in order to receive the benefit of the covenant that God has with His people on earth.

Vital in times of reformation

At truly great moments in Hebrew history, confession made a significant impact on the effectiveness of true reformation. Early in his reign Solomon prayed, “And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and

confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers. When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them; then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance” (2 Chronicles 6:24–27).

Two hundred and fifty years later, great joy followed the confession of God’s people during the time of Hezekiah, as recorded in 2 Chronicles chapter 30.

Notice also the emphasis in the prayer of Nehemiah before the great reformation wrought under his leadership: “Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that

thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. . . . And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (Nehemiah 1:6; 9:2).

Notice the power of confession in the time of Ezra: "Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore" (Ezra 10:1).

The priest made the earnest appeal, "Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do" (Ezra 10:11, 12).

The attitude of Daniel

Righteous Daniel prayed, "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. . . . O Lord, hear;

O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (Daniel 9:8–11, 19).

What result followed? "And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation" (Daniel 9:20, 21).

The testimony of David

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah" (Psalm 32:1–5).

In the New Testament, we continue to see the amazing influence surrounding confession. For example, as the Holy Spirit was working powerfully among both the Jews and Greeks at Ephesus, "fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds" (Acts 19:17, 18).

Confession is an important step of faith, but the real fruit of it comes as we repent and quit practicing the sin confessed. The archenemy of our souls likes to seduce us into sin

by making us think it's really not a serious matter—and then when we fall, he comes back with fiendish delight in making us think that the sin committed was the worst thing ever and that we are so utterly doomed to destruction we should not even bother confessing because it's too late.

“

At truly great moments in Hebrew history, confession made a significant impact on the effectiveness of true reformation.”

But the truth is that even if we sometimes must face bitter consequences because of wrongdoing, Inspiration nonetheless declares: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me" (Micah 7:8).

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee" (Job 5:17–19).

Qualities of true confession

"The apostle says, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for

another, that ye may be healed.' James 5:16. Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother

you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you sinned against his Creator and Redeemer. . . .

"If we have not experienced that repentance which is not to be repented of, and have not with true humiliation of soul and brokenness of spirit confessed our sins, abhorring our iniquity, we have never truly

sought for the forgiveness of sin; and if we have never sought, we have never found the peace of God. The only reason why we do not have remission of sins that are past is that we are not willing to humble our hearts and comply with the conditions of the word of truth. Explicit instruction is given concerning this matter. Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed. It is not to be urged from the sinner. It is not to be made in a flippant and careless way, or forced from those who have no realizing sense of the abhorrent character of sin. The confession that is the outpouring of the inmost soul finds its way to the God of infinite pity. The psalmist says, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit' (Psalm 34:18).

"True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty."¹

Avoiding the falseness of Achan

In the time of Joshua, the successful conquest of Jericho was followed by a bitterly humiliating defeat at the city of Ai because the Lord's blessing had been withdrawn from Israel. Why? It was due to the secret sin of Achan. The whole nation was affected by Achan's crime—and he had plenty of time to admit his wrong, but procrastinated and didn't say anything until after he had already been identified as the culprit.

"Achan acknowledged his guilt, but when it was too late for the confession to benefit himself. He had seen the armies of Israel return from Ai defeated and disheartened; yet he



did not come forward and confess his sin. He had seen Joshua and the elders of Israel bowed to the earth in grief too great for words. Had he then made confession, he would have given some proof of true penitence; but he still kept silence. He had listened to the proclamation that a great crime had been committed, and had even heard its character definitely stated. But his lips were sealed. Then came the solemn investigation. How his soul thrilled with terror as he saw his tribe pointed out, then his family and his household! But still he uttered no confession, until the finger of God was placed upon him. Then, when his sin could no longer be concealed, he admitted the truth. How often are similar confessions made. There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they have been proved and confessing sins known only to ourselves and to God. Achan would not have confessed had he not hoped by so doing to avert the consequences of his crime. But his confession only served to show that his punishment was just. There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no change of purpose, no abhorrence of evil.

“So confessions will be made by the guilty when they stand before the bar of God, after every case has been decided for life or death. The consequences to result to himself will draw from each an acknowledgment of his sin. It will be forced from the soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking for of judgment. But such confessions cannot save the sinner.”²

What about our confessions—my confessions?

“There are many professed Christians whose confessions of sin are similar to that of Achan. They will, in a general way, acknowledge their unworthiness, but they refuse to confess the sins whose guilt rests upon their conscience, and which have brought the frown of God upon His people. Thus many conceal sins of selfishness, overreaching, dishonesty toward God and their neighbor, sins

in the family, and many others which it is proper to confess in public.

“Genuine repentance springs from a sense of the offensive character of sin. These general confessions are not the fruit of true humiliation of soul before God. They leave the sinner with a self-complacent spirit to go on as before, until his conscience becomes hardened, and warnings that once aroused him produce hardly a feeling of danger and after a time his sinful course appears right. All too late his sins will find him out, in that day when they shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever. There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they are proved, and confessing sins known only to ourselves and God.”³

“The love of God will never lead to the belittling of sin; it will never cover or excuse an unconfessed wrong.”⁴

“That repentance which is produced by the influence of divine grace upon the heart, will lead to the confession and forsaking of sin. Such were the fruits which the apostle declares had been manifested by the Corinthian church: ‘What carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal’ (2 Corinthians 7:11).”⁵

Our greatest and most urgent need

“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. **But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing.**”⁶

“The Lord desires His servants today to preach the old gospel doctrine, sorrow for sin, repentance, and confession.”⁷

“The examples in God’s word of genuine repentance and humiliation reveal a spirit of confession in which there is no excuse for sin or attempt at self-justification. Paul did not seek to shield himself; he paints his sin in its darkest hue, not attempting to lessen his guilt. He says, ‘Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities’ (Acts 26:10, 11). He does not hesitate to declare that ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief’ (1 Timothy 1:15).

“The humble and broken heart, subdued by genuine repentance, will appreciate something of the love of God and the cost of Calvary; and as a son confesses to a loving father, so will the truly penitent bring all his sins before God. And it is written, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9).”⁸

Conclusion

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13)—and isn’t that what we all need?

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Obedience & Righteousness by Faith

by G. Robles

God delights in those who worship Him in willing obedience (see 1 Samuel 15:22). But to many within the church, obedience is a struggle; even a lifelong conflict. Often there are fleeting moments of victory, and many more defeats. Yet, does God actually require perfect and consistent obedience from us, and if so, how is it possible?

It was as true of Adam and Eve as it is today that “Obedience, perfect and perpetual, was the condition of eternal happiness.”¹ Let’s then look at the dynamics of obedience as related to righteousness by faith.

Why people struggle to obey

Obedience is a struggle only when we love to disobey. In such a state of mind, we read verses such as, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” and “Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” and because we fear the consequences of disobedience we take it as a cue to just try harder. We see terms like *holy* and *perfect* as things we *do* and *achieve* rather than a *state of being* that God creates. The result is that our Christianity then becomes a failed endeavor rather than a divine accomplishment.

We also have a tendency to think that if we just try hard enough and if we just have enough faith in Christ, our obedience will be acceptable in the sight of God. My past experience seems to support this idea. And perhaps you feel the same way about yours.

Our only hope

One thing the fall of Adam and Eve show us is that God requires obedience to *all* of His commandments, *always*. It would have been at least natural for Adam and Eve to render obedience such as this because they were morally upright and they desired only good. But since the fall, humanity regularly finds that obedience is a drudgery; it conflicts with desires we know are wrong. It is for this reason that Christ proposes to change our natures.

“[Christ] was to bear the penalty of the transgression of the law of God, not to give men liberty to continue in sin, but **to take away their inclination to sin, that they might not desire to transgress**. Those who receive Christ are obedient to His commands; for His mind is given to them. He imbues them with His spirit of obedience, and they return to their loyalty.”²

Our only hope then, is for God to change who we are on the inside and restore the moral uprightness within us that Adam lost through sin.

Which comes first—obedience or righteousness?

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

The above verse tells us that the obedience of Christ alone makes believers righteous. What it also tells us is that we are sinners by inheritance, not because we sinned, but because Adam sinned. In other words, we inherited the “sinner” nature of Adam before we ever disobeyed. If it were true that we are sinners only after we sin, then it would follow that we are made righteous only once we obey, but this idea destroys the truth of righteousness by faith in Christ and turns it into righteousness by works of obedience.

Romans 5:19 tells us however, that we are *made righteous* not through our obedience, but by the obedience of One, even Jesus Christ. Those whom God makes obedient, He first makes righteous, and righteousness comes by faith alone (Galatians 2:16).

The *state of being* righteous makes the tree good, and therefore the fruit is also good. Notice how the apostle John described this:

“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7).

Doing righteousness (obedience) then is a *result* of being righteous and not a means to achieving it. It is this truth that God has made known to His children ever since the world began.

Learning from the past

Ever since God promised Adam and Eve that He would introduce a divine principle of conflict with sin within the heart of man, He has sought to teach the race lessons of obedience.

Remarkably, God has selectively preserved sacred history specifically to teach those living in the last days of earth history these important lessons.

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Revelation 14:12 describes the last generation of people. They are said to have three identifying traits: the faith of Jesus, they keep the commandments of God, and they are patient. These people have the relationship between faith and works just right. In fact, to them, it's not a matter of faith *and* works, but of faith *that* works. Their patience proves they have a tried faith. Their works prove they have a genuine faith. They have learned from the past, especially from the experience of ancient Israel.

Unconverted Israel

When it came to obedience, ancient Israel displayed a natural deficiency, revealing the depravity

of the human heart. When God condescended to meet with them at Mt. Sinai, the people of God felt uncomfortable in His presence.

Despite this, they rashly promised obedience to all His requirements. But after hearing God's own voice utter the Ten Commandments, they urgently requested of Moses, “Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it” (Deuteronomy 5:27).

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How often do we attempt to obey, and yet feel neither delight nor peace in God's presence? Are we also exerting our own obedience, yet lacking any type of a meaningful relationship with God? Such obedience

is cosmetic. It fades away just as easily as it was put on.

Why the old covenant?

God allowed Israel to enter into a covenant of obedience with Him. We know this as the “Old Covenant.” Under the terms of this covenant, Israel had to render perfect obedience—and no forgiveness was offered if they transgressed voluntarily (Leviticus 18:5; Exodus 23:20, 21; Joshua 24:19). It's not hard to see why such a covenant was broken by the people just a few days after it was ratified. In the book of Hebrews, this covenant is described as transitory, old, decaying and “ready to vanish away.”

Overconfident Israel desired such a covenant. The people didn't realize the weakness of their own hearts and this was the best way God could reveal it to them. What better way was there? Maybe parents can sympathize with God when they see no other way but to let their children do what they please so they can see their great need for themselves.

But God was desirous all along to make an everlasting covenant with Israel that was based upon better promises. This covenant would no longer be based on a fickle promise of obedience, but upon infallible promises of grace and mercy—grace that changes hearts, and mercy that forgives transgressions (Hebrews 8:10–12).



Notice God's reaction to Israel's pledge of obedience at Mt. Sinai, "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken" (Deuteronomy 5:28). Here, God does not accept what they said; He just asserts that what they said was fluent. In other words, their commitment to obedience was admirable, but insufficient when coming from hearts that were so fickle!

The very next verse reveals God's profound yearning for a different state of things, "O that there were **such an heart** in them, that they would fear me, and keep *all* my commandments *always*, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" Verse 29, emphasis added.

In one brief sentence, God singles out the point at issue, the fickleness of the human heart. You see, our problem is that we either obey God's law sometimes or some of it always. But God declares that in order for us to enjoy an eternity of wellness, we must obey all the commandments always.

Like ancient Israel, we as Seventh-day Adventists have had our fair share of an "old covenant" spirit. Ask yourself this question: is your faith and obedience based upon the old covenant or is it founded upon the everlasting covenant? Let's take a little tour of Adventist history to better answer this question.

1888 and the covenants

Conflicting views of the covenants formed part of the bitter controversy that pervaded the Minneapolis General Conference of 1888.

Prominent among those that resisted the light of righteousness by faith at that conference were George Butler (the President) and Uriah Smith (Editor of *The Review and Herald*). These two men exerted enormous influence upon the denomination. A few months after the conference, Ellen White summed up the sentiment of

many of the lay members in a letter she wrote to two elders:

"Some have said," she wrote, "If this message that Brother A. T. Jones has been giving to the church is the truth, why is it that Brother Smith and Brother Butler have not received it, and have not united with him in heralding it? These good intelligent men would surely know if this was the message of truth."³

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We put the cart before the horse when we attempt to obey without genuine faith. **Faith believes God and it moves the soul in response.**”

Butler and Uriah Smith held to a view of the covenants that smelled strongly of righteousness by works. The tenor of their writings expressed an emphasis on righteousness by obedience, just like ancient Israel—very much opposed to the messages God sent through Elders Waggoner and Jones.

Just a few months after the 1888 General Conference, Uriah Smith—incensed at what he thought was an attack upon the law of God—published an editorial in *The Review and Herald* entitled, "Our Righteousness." Smith attempted to correct the "error" some had circulated in suggesting that any attempts at keeping the law of God were as "filthy rags." What he wrote reveals the Old Covenant theology

held by the majority of Adventists at that time:

"The law is spiritual, holy, just, and good, the divine standard of righteousness. Perfect obedience to it will develop perfect righteousness, and that is the only way any one can attain to righteousness."

"In Deuteronomy 6:24, 25 we read: 'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.' The Lord would not command them to do what He had not made adequate provision for them to do; and if they did do it, it would be their righteousness. And 'our righteousness' cannot in this case be filthy rags. How would it sound if we should read it thus: 'And it shall "be filthy rags, if we observe to do all these commandments . . . as he hath commanded us"? . . .

"Suppose we try the 'filthy rag' construction on Matt. 5:20: 'For I say unto you that except your filthy rags' shall exceed the "filthy rags" of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.' That surely would not be very edifying reading to any one. There is then a righteousness that we must have, to be secured by doing and teaching the commandments. And the scribes and Pharisees did some things which were righteous, or Christ could not have introduced the comparison He did, and said, except yours shall exceed theirs."⁴

A week later, Ellen White preached a sermon in Rome, New York, entitled "Christ and the Law." She urged the people to receive the light of the righteousness of Christ by faith. Some in the audience couldn't harmonize what she was

saying with what Smith wrote a few days prior in the *Review*. She said to them:

“Brethren, do not let any of you be thrown off the track. ‘Well,’ you say, ‘What does Brother Smith’s piece in the *Review* mean?’ He doesn’t know what he is talking about; he sees trees as men walking. . . . It is impossible for us to exalt the law of Jehovah unless we take hold of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.”⁵

There were a couple of leading flaws in Smith’s and Butler’s view of righteousness:

An incorrect reading of Romans 5:25 led them to believe and teach that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to our account for sins that are past only. They taught that once a man is justified by faith for sins that are past, they must now through faith in the power of Christ’s strength reach a level of obedience that would be acceptable enough to get them through the time of trouble.

They reasoned that the Pharisees’ ignorance of God’s righteousness consisted only in their persistence in keeping the ceremonial law after Christ had already come. In other words, whatever good they did in keeping the Moral Law, was good enough.

On the other hand, Waggoner and Jones, inspired by the simplicity of the gospel, declared that the righteousness of Christ alone was sufficient to meet the demands of the law of God and that His righteousness was both imputed and imparted to us by faith alone.

When Waggoner taught this truth in the context of the everlasting covenant during his lectures at Minneapolis, Ellen White recognized it as light sent from heaven. In a letter to Uriah Smith dated March 8, 1890, Ellen White wrote:

“Night before last I was shown that evidences in regard to the covenants were clear and convincing. Yourself, Brother B, C [Dan Jones, Brother Porter] and others are spending your investigative powers for naught to produce a position on the covenants to vary from the position that Brother [E. J.] Waggoner has presented. Had you received the true light which shineth, you would not have imitated or gone over the same manner of interpretation and misconstruing the Scriptures as did the Jews.”⁶

On the same day she wrote the letter, she delivered a sermon to the leading ministers of Battle Creek church. She told them:

“Now I tell you here before God, that the covenant question, as it has been presented, is the truth.”⁷

The obedience of faith

In Romans 16:26, Paul writes of the “obedience of faith.” We put the cart before the horse when we attempt to obey without genuine faith. Faith believes God and it moves the soul in response. Galatians 5:6 speaks of a “faith which works by love”—what does this faith look like? It looks like Noah, when he believed God would send a flood, and that belief moved him in response to obey and build an ark. It looks like Abraham, when he believed God would make him a father of many nations when he offered up Isaac, believing God would resurrect him. Faith first believes the Word and then moves the soul in response.

To the word of command, faith responds in obedience. To the word of warning, faith responds in preparation. To the word of exhortation, faith responds in promptly heeding. To the word of reproof, faith responds in acceptance and humility. To the word of encouragement, faith responds in being comforted. Obedience is a natural response of faith. It should never be isolated from it, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Sacrifice & intercession of Christ

The everlasting covenant alone provides sinners with the assurance of salvation. It provides us with:

A sacrifice for sins that are past, present and future: Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 10:14; 1 John 2:1.

The perfecting righteousness of Christ to cover all imperfections of the obedience of faith.

Conclusion

The possibility of rendering to God acceptable obedience is placed beyond the realm of doubt, when we understand how the righteousness of Christ completes us. Let us remember that all in terms of faith and obedience is made acceptable only through the merits of Jesus Christ. After all is said and done, we are yet “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10).

“The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. . . . All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ’s propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable.”⁸

References

- ¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 49.
- ² *The Youth’s Instructor*, April 6, 1899. [Emphasis added.]
- ³ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 417.
- ⁴ *The Review and Herald*, June 11, 1889 (Uriah Smith).
- ⁵ *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 116.
- ⁶ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 328.
- ⁷ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 596.
- ⁸ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 6, p. 1078.

Service and Thankfulness

by E. Nataren

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30).

"The whole being—heart, soul, mind, and strength—is to be used in God's service. What is there left that is not devoted to God?"¹

Are you thankful to God under any and all circumstances? As the economy has continued to struggle and perhaps you have financial difficulties, are you still trusting God? This life is full of disappointments and many times we face health problems or we have lost a loved one. Such circumstances can be tremendously difficult. But even so, we all have much for which to be thankful.

When Christ recreates our hearts, the motive of our existence is to serve our fellowmen. That was one of the main teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said that He came to this earth to serve and not to be served. This attitude helped Him to be always thankful to His Heavenly Father. If we keep this thought in mind, then we will be thankful every moment of our life.

The blessing of self-denial

As Christians we have the tendency to overlook some aspects of discipleship. For example, we are asked to deny ourselves. Our Lord Jesus has instructed us in that direction: "And

when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

Our goal is to use every means that the Lord has given to us in His service and leave the results to Him.

We see the blessing of this sacrifice in the life of Job—a life of obedience to God and service to his fellowmen. "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out" (Job 29:11–16).

By working in this direction, God will bless us to continue blessing others, our heart will be filled with praises and thanksgiving to God, and we will experience the difference between being merely a religious person and being a real Christian.

What if we are not living a life of service? Then we must reexamine our motives and review our life before God:

"With many, the rubbish of the world has clogged the channels of the soul. **Selfishness has controlled**

the mind and warped the character. Were the life hid with Christ in God, **His service would be no drudgery.** If the whole heart were consecrated to God, all would find something to do, and would covet a part in the work. They would sow beside all waters, praying and believing that the fruit would appear. **The practical, God-fearing workers will be growing upward, praying in faith for grace and heavenly wisdom that they may do the work devolving upon them with cheerfulness and a willing mind.**"²

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24–26).

"The plan of salvation was laid in a sacrifice so broad and deep and high that it is immeasurable. Christ did not send His angels to this fallen world, while He remained in heaven; **but He Himself went without the camp, bearing the reproach. He became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; Himself took our infirmities, and bore our weaknesses. And the absence of self-denial in His professed followers, God regards as a denial of the Christian**

name. Those who profess to be one with Christ, and indulge their selfish desires for rich and expensive **clothing, furniture, and food, are Christians only in name.** To be a Christian is to be Christlike.

“And yet how true are the words of the apostle: ‘For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s’ (Philippians 2:21). Many Christians do not have works corresponding to the name they bear. They act as if they had never heard of the plan of redemption wrought out at infinite cost.”³

“Those who would gain the blessing of sanctification must first learn the meaning of self-sacrifice. The cross of Christ is the central pillar on which hangs the ‘far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory’ (2 Corinthians 4:17). [Matthew 16:24 quoted.] It is the fragrance of our love for our fellowmen that reveals our love for God. **It is patience in service that brings rest to the soul.**”⁴

The blessing of heaven-born love

The apostle Paul had a fervent love for the souls for whom he labored.

What caused it? A commitment to bring glory to God and to be joyful at all times. “For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the **thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.** For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, **yet the inward man is renewed day by day.** For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:15–18).

The love of Jesus was Paul’s only motive. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). The apostle was a man who had learned the true meaning of thanksgiving, even when he faced great adversity. Even in the time of imprisonment (Acts 16:25),

he lived by his own advice to be “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19, 20).

The Bible tells us that whatever we have is not ours and that everything is the Lord’s property—and we have to give thanks to God because He has allowed us to enjoy the benefits of it. King David recognized this when “David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is



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my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (1 Chronicles 29:10–14).

Everything belongs to God and was given to us to help everyone else around us. This is the motive of true religion, as the Lord explains: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward” (Isaiah 58:6–8).

The principle of helping others goes hand-in-hand with the principle of thanksgiving; both of them are moved by the love of God. 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

The blessing of gratitude

What happens as we put these principles of service and thanksgiving into daily practice?

“The whole being is to be consecrated to the service of the Master.”⁵

“No one can be truly united with Christ, practicing His lessons, submitting to His yoke of restraint, without realizing that which he can never express in words. New, rich thoughts come to him. Light is given to the intellect, determination to the will, sensitiveness to the conscience, purity to the imagination. The heart becomes more tender, the thoughts more spiritual, the service more Christlike. In the life there is seen that which no words can express—true, faithful, loving devotion of heart, mind, soul, and strength to the work of the Master.”⁶

With thanksgiving and praise we continually show that Christ is living in us. “O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord, and His strength: seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth” (Psalm 105:1–5).

“O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth

for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. . . . Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:1, 2, 15).

“Brethren and sisters, the Lord is our God. If Christ is formed within, the hope of glory, we have a hope in God that it is impossible for us to keep to ourselves. We will praise Him. We do not praise Him as much as we should. Whoso offers praise glorifies God. Now instead of speaking doleful words, and telling of our trials and afflictions, let us thank God that we can speak at all, and resolve that we will endeavor to glorify His name.”⁷

Making the best out of the worst

When difficult times come into our lives, how can difficulties be turned into positive experiences?

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9).

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“When someone asks how you are feeling, do not try to think of something mournful to tell in order to gain sympathy. Do not talk of your lack of faith and your sorrows and sufferings. The tempter delights to hear such words. When talking on gloomy subjects, you are glorifying him. We are not to dwell on the great power of Satan to overcome us. Often we give ourselves into his hands by talking of his power.... Have we not reason to be thankful every moment, thankful even when there are apparent difficulties in our pathway?”⁸

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The principle of helping others goes hand-in-hand with the principle of thanksgiving; both of them are moved by the love of God.”

We cannot deny the fact that sometimes sadness and grief take place in our lives. This is the effect of sin, and has been since the enemy of souls introduced it into this earth at the dawn of human history. But there is a cure for sadness and grief, as found in the following Bible verses:

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Psalm 42:11).

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (James 5:13).

“The Lord Jesus wants us to bear a pleasant countenance, and to speak kind, sympathetic words. Even if we are sick, or if we feel out of sorts, we need not tell others. If we will talk of the goodness of the Lord, this will act as a cure for sadness and grief.”⁹

“Make it a rule never to utter one word of doubt or discouragement.”¹⁰

What topic should we avoid, as much as possible, in our conversation?

“The more you dwell upon discouragement, talking to others about your trials, and enlarging upon them, to enlist the sympathy which you crave, the more discouragements and trials you will have. Why mourn over that which we cannot avoid? God is inviting us to close the windows of the soul earthward and open them heavenward that He may flood our hearts with the glory which is shining across the threshold of heaven.”¹¹ “Even under temptation, our language may be that of faith and hope and courage.”¹²

An ungrateful heart is the result of bitterness, selfishness and dissatisfaction. Please, let us be a people with gratitude and joy for our salvation; let us show a spirit of happiness and thankfulness.

Becoming a different kind of people

All around us we can see the spirit of ingratitude and a lack of thankfulness. Children do not give thanks to their parents for all that they do to favor them. We take for granted the ways that others help us. And God is forgotten in our daily activities. The result is that people are more miserable and ungracious. They’re always looking ahead of them to see who has more or what others have achieved—and when they see the blessings that others have then a spirit of discontent and envy takes control of them. Look behind you and see others that have nothing—that are living with the minimum that they can get. Some

don’t even have a house or a car, not enough clothes and despite this, they live their lives with joy, happiness, and peace. A heart that is indifferent to the mercies and blessings of God becomes an ungrateful heart. We are dependent on God for everything. Why should we be thankful? For each blessing that we receive, an action of thanksgiving should be presented to our Lord.

Remember, ingratitude is a sin and darkens the heart (Romans 1:21).

Give thanks to God always and think about the things that you have and praise Him for them. The following are some suggestions for which you may give thanks to God every day:

1. Thank God for the blessings that He gives you to sustain your family and help your children to form their life in this world (1 Chronicles 29:12–14).
2. Thank God even if you are not having a good time in your life. Even when those whom you consider your best friends have abandoned you, it is good to remember that He will never leave you. (James 1:2–4, Isaiah 41:10, 13).
3. Thank God for Jesus Christ, the salvation given to you by the merits of His sacrifice and His blood. (2 Corinthians 9:15).
4. Thank God for the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding us with His power and wisdom. (John 16:7; 14:26).
5. Thank God for the presence of the good angels that always protect us from the attacks of Satan. (Psalm 34:7).

References

- ¹ *The Review and Herald*, November 6, 1900.
- ² *Ibid.*, December 19, 1878. [Emphasis added.]
- ³ *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 54. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁴ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 560. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁵ *General Conference Bulletin*, April 16, 1901.
- ⁶ *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 476, 477.
- ⁷ *The Voice in Speech and Song*, p. 148.
- ⁸ *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 253, 254. [Emphasis added.]
- ⁹ *The Voice in Speech and Song*, pp. 132, 133.
- ¹⁰ *Steps to Christ*, p. 119.
- ¹¹ *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 579.
- ¹² *The Review and Herald*, May 13, 1884.

An Offering of Praise

by H. Paredes

If there is any good gift that one can give to God, it is to present oneself as an offering to Him. A life consecrated to the Lord is one of the best offerings we can give to Him. A converted heart melted by the love of Jesus will always be seeking to present itself to God as an instrument of praise.

Christ taught us that true happiness is found in doing something on behalf of others. How much more should we be seeking to please the One that has so graciously given all on behalf of humanity? When we perceive a glimpse of the greatness of God manifested in the vast creation, each one of us cannot help but “stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name,

which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Nehemiah 9:5, 6).

From selfishness to devotion

Because of sin, each of us tends to live a self-centered life, devoted to the cares of this world. Blinded by our own affairs, we fail to see the goodness of God manifested in our daily lives. “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being

bound in affliction and iron” (Psalm 107:8–10).

One of the many reasons we have to praise the great God of heaven is because we are wonderfully made and because we were made to be a praise to our Maker. But we must understand the kind of praise that is acceptable to God. The psalmist said: “I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee” (Psalm 138:1).

Wholeheartedness

What does it mean to praise God with the whole heart? The concept of “praise” is the act of expressing admiration. It is the offering of grateful homage in words or song, as in the act of worship. It is the

life that is lived as a manifestation of our gratitude to our Creator and Redeemer. To praise with the whole heart means much more than a simple expression or exaltation of God—it means to have a personal knowledge of the God of heaven and to marvel at His infinite greatness. The better our understanding of the greatness of God, the more faithful we will be to praise the Lord Jehovah. We are counseled to educate ourselves to offer praises to our Maker as long as we live.

According to His greatness

There are many reasons to praise the God of heaven. Let us “Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness” (Psalm 150:2).

Our praise toward God ought to be proportionate to His excellent greatness toward us. Therefore it is very important to seek a clear perception of the greatness of God. Among those who have been privileged to behold directly God’s glory, there has been a deep sense of reverence and humility.

The prophet Isaiah saw the Most High and attempted to describe this wonderful experience. He wrote, “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is the
Lord of hosts: the
whole earth

is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:1–5).

“

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Jehovah.”

An expression of praise

God created the human race in His own image and endowed it with all the necessary capabilities to offer acceptable praise to His majesty. God has also given us the intelligence to make devices to be used as instruments of praise: “And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the Lord, which David the king had made to praise the Lord, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood” (2 Chronicles 7:6).

Beside musical instruments, we have been given the most personal way of expressing praise: “The human voice that sings the music of God from a heart filled with gratitude and thanksgiving is far more pleasing to Him than the melody of all the musical instruments ever invented by human hands.”¹

When the children of Israel gathered themselves for God’s worship, they were accompanied by many voices in chorus. “Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped” (2 Chronicles 29:30).

“Let the voices of the followers of Christ be so trained that instead of crowding words together in a thick, indistinct way, their utterance may be clear, forcible, and edifying. Do not let the voice fall after each word, but keep it up so that each sentence will be full and complete. Will it be worth disciplining yourself, if by so doing you are able to add interest to the service of God and to edify His children? The voice of thanksgiving, praise, and rejoicing is heard in heaven. The voices of the angels in heaven unite with the voices of the children of God on earth as they ascribe honor and glory and praise to God and to the Lamb for the great salvation provided.”²

Acceptable service

On the occasion of the dedication of the temple built by Solomon, the glory of the God of heaven was seen in approval of the great edifice built by His people with the skills given by God Himself. At the great day of its dedication, a mighty manifestation of God was seen: “And the priests

could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever" (2 Chronicles 7:2, 3).

True worshipers

In ancient times, the children of Israel were instructed to praise the God of heaven in true worship. After the many victories that the children of Israel were able to achieve against their enemies, it was their privilege and duty to offer thanksgiving services and hymns of praise. Every living creature should imitate that same practice.

Every day there are many reasons to offer thanksgiving to our Maker; each breath of life is a victory. The human heart beats constantly because God gives vitality to every living being.

“

It was God's plan that every created being be an instrument of praise.”

During the time when the people of Judah were under the leadership of king Jehoshaphat and they were attacked by a coalition of their surrounding enemies, the Lord granted a mighty victory to His people as they expressed their praise: “And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out

before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped” (2 Chronicles 20:21–24).

Part of the reformatory work of Nehemiah was to restore to the leadership of Judah those who would lead in expressing gratitude to God.

“And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited. And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God” (Nehemiah 12:44–46).

“‘Whoso offereth praise,’ says the Creator, ‘glorifieth Me.’ Psalm 50:23. All the inhabitants of heaven unite in praising God. Let us learn the song of the angels now, that we may sing it when we join their shining ranks. Let us say with the psalmist, ‘While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.’ ‘Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee.’ Psalm 146:2; 67:5.”³

All creation

It was God's plan that every created being be an instrument of

praise. He has given us sufficient reasons to fulfill His desire—and even nature does not withhold its praise. The psalmist says: “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord” (Psalm 150:6). When we realize that all the angelic host find their joy in expressing their words and songs of praise to their Creator, how much more should simple, sinful fallen humans make every effort to offer acceptable praise!

Natures itself rejoices and praises the Creator. “Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created” (Psalm 148:1–5).

A deep recognition of the Majesty of heaven, the clear realization of His mighty creation, will inspire all humanity with the deepest gratitude toward the Creator because “the heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath He given to the children of men. The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord” (Psalm 115:16–18).

We can become a praise to the Lord

The most acceptable praise that we can give to God is the fulfillment in our life of the great object for which we were created. To accept His plan of redemption is an expression of gratitude. The great center of adoration in heaven, Jesus Christ, left His glory in heaven to come to this sinful world to give His life as a ransom for our sin and make of every son and daughter of Adam a praise to His name. By His unfailing love and forgiving power, we can become a glory to His name. “And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned

against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it” (Jeremiah 33:8, 9).

“The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor who is at God’s right hand presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ’s propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned.”⁴

“Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah. Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men” (Psalm 66:1–5).

Conclusion

A gift is not a gift unless the person to whom it is given accepts it. Nobody wants to offer something that may be rejected. The most wonderful gift we can give to God is our own heart. The heart must be subdued by the love of Jesus, humbled by His amazing grace. Unless the heart is renewed by the conversion of a new birth and we possess the fruits of the Spirit, our offering will not be accepted. In order for the offering of praise to be accepted by God, it must come from a heart like that of a little child. “And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?” (Matthew 21:16).

“ ‘Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth’s sake’ (Psalm 115:1). Such was the spirit that pervaded Israel’s song of deliverance,

and it is the spirit that should dwell in the hearts of all who love and fear God. In freeing out souls from the bondage of sin, God has wrought for us a deliverance greater than that of the Hebrews at the Red Sea. Like the Hebrew host, we should praise the Lord with heart and soul and voice for His ‘wonderful works to the children of men.’ Those who dwell upon God’s great mercies, and are not unmindful of His lesser gifts, will put on the girdle of gladness and make melody in their hearts to the Lord. The daily blessings that we receive from the hand of God, and above all else the death of Jesus to bring happiness and heaven within our reach, should be a theme for constant gratitude. What compassion, what matchless love, has God shown to us, lost sinners, in connecting us with Himself, to be to Him a peculiar treasure! What a sacrifice has been made by our Redeemer, that we may be called children of God! We should praise God for the blessed hope held out before us in the great plan of redemption, we should praise Him for the heavenly inheritance and for His rich promises; praise Him that Jesus lives to intercede for us.”⁵

References

- ¹ *Evangelism*, p. 506.
- ² *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 246.
- ³ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 289, 290.
- ⁴ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 6, p. 1078.
- ⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 289.

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MOVING? Please let us know.

Is It Worth It?

Johnny had just received a nice, generous gift of \$100.00 from his aunt. He knew he had to use that much money very wisely.

First, he needed to return the tithe to God. So, the first 10% of the money was placed in a tithe envelope and was labeled as tithe.

Then Johnny wanted to give a freewill offering. Because he was so thankful, he added a good amount, another \$10.00 in the tithe envelope to be included as offering and wrote on the envelope where he wanted the money to go. Then he began to think about how he wanted the offering to be divided.

"Hmmm," said Johnny. "I'd like to see the brethren be able to finish that new church building in their city a few hours from here. I'll give to the building fund."

"Next," thought Johnny, "I need to remember the poor. There were some neighbors that

visited our church the other day—and I think they might have had to ask the deacon for help since they barely seemed to have enough to eat and their little toddler did not have warm shoes. And even if they didn't ask for help, maybe the church board will decide either to give something to them anyway or to other people like them. So the church had better have some money in the poor fund."

"Then there's the media fund. I'd like to see the brethren get some better equipment to be able to make some CD's or videos to send the message to people who live too far away to be able to come to church."

So Johnny labeled the envelope to give part of his offering to each of those funds.

That was done. Next Johnny thought, "I know I should save as much of my money as possible. But since there are also some things I need, too, I will ask Dad to take me to the store to buy them."

There the father and son were at the store, looking at the various items. Johnny saw a handsome sweater he really liked and said, "Dad, I like this, but it's not worth what they are asking."

"Not worth it?" Dad asked. "You have a right to decide that, son. Something may look nice, but if it is not worth it, don't get it."

Many things in life are not worth our time, our money, or our thought. But there is one thing that is worthwhile. That is the worship of the One who made us and feeds us and keeps us alive. And that's where the idea of "worship" comes from.

Johnny had received his money from his aunt—whom God had used to give him a blessing. So, Johnny in turn wanted to bless other worthwhile causes.

Most important for little boys and for all of us, however, is to be able to say to our Creator: "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).—BHM.



CHILDREN'S
CORNER