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herald

Regaining Your
First Love

Week of Prayer, December 3-12, 2010

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of Prayer
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The love of Christ is like a magnet. Jesus declared: "If I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). His sacrifice on Calvary has a drawing power—it attracts us because it reveals the tremendous glory of His totally unselfish, heaven-born love.

As the body of Christ, the church should likewise be energized with that same drawing power. Yet, tragically, in these last days, the love of many has waxed cold—so too often the church actually repels instead of draws. And now is certainly not the time in history when that should be happening!

The Week of Prayer for this year is based on "Regaining Your First Love." We will be learning from Christ's message to the early church, since there are many parallels between their time and ours. Just as the early believers received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early rain, Christ is eager for us to prepare for an even greater outpouring in the latter rain—all for the purpose of winning other souls through love. But we must be in a position to receive that wonderful privilege and blessing. This is what these Week of Prayer meetings are designed to promote. Please remember to share the material also with isolated believers, encouraging them with your prayers and visitation. Let us also keep in mind:

- **SABBATH, DECEMBER 11: A DAY OF PRAYER WITH FASTING.**
- **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12: AN OFFERING WILL BE GATHERED FOR NEW MISSIONS.**

We trust that this Week of Prayer will be a blessed opportunity to revive our first love for Christ and for one another, in sweet harmony with the earnest plea of the One who first loved us!

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

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The Perfect Balance

One thing that stands out in Christ's message to the angel of the church of Ephesus is a poignant appeal for balance.

God earnestly desires for His people to reflect His perfect character. He is counting on us—His followers—to rightly represent Him to a fallen, confused world. This beautiful character of love might aptly be summarized as the perfect balance of **justice and mercy**. God's righteousness is revealed in His ability to "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). In His unchanging law is revealed His justice. And His mercy is revealed in how He tenderly justifies the repentant sinner.

What happened to the church of Ephesus?

This topic will be touched upon throughout these readings for the Week of Prayer. As we consider what is involved in the loss and regaining of the "first love" experience, a perpetual problem comes to mind: The frequent tendency of God's people throughout history to err by tipping the scale in the balance of character on either of two sides:

1. Being too heavy on the side of justice, so that mercy is not exercised as fully as it should be.

2. Being too heavy on the side of mercy, so that God's moral law is lightly regarded.

The Pharisees in Christ's day erred on the first side. Apostate Protestantism today errs on the second side. Neither presents the healthy balance of God's true character.

In Christ's appeal to early believers as depicted in Ephesus, it would appear that the believers started off quite well but then may have begun to err on the first side.

What about us?

As Reformers, we, too, are zealous for perfection. There is certainly a good reason for this, for Christ has indeed bidden this generation to develop a perfect character. After all, "when the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."¹ So, we expect perfection from one another, and we hold one another accountable to reach that goal. That is good. However, might we too often be missing an essential part of the picture? Jesus asks, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (Matthew 7:3). Our vision may become so clouded—so imbalanced—

that we miss out on discerning our own beam while vigorously pointing out someone else's mote. This is why the message of the True Witness to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans is also needed today. The final message to be borne to this last generation will be a balanced message. It will not be tipped too heavily on either side. "Justice has a twin sister that should ever stand by her side, which is Mercy and Love."²

"The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

"The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness."³ This is the glorious fruit of a "first love" experience. It's unmistakable. It's appealing. Let us eagerly strive for it! ✪

References

¹ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

² *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21, p. 430.

³ *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

Symptoms of Lost Love

*"I have somewhat against thee,
because thou hast left thy first love.
Remember therefore from whence
thou art fallen, and repent, and do
the first works; or else I will come
unto thee quickly, and will remove
thy candlestick out of his place,
except thou repent"
(Revelation 2:4, 5).*



*Compiled from the writings
of E. G. White*

Lost is the fervor. The first affection of the convert to Christ is deep, full, and ardent. It is not necessary that this love should become less as knowledge increases, as the more and increased light shines upon him. That love should become more fervent as he becomes better acquainted with his Lord. God sees that **there is not heart service, a love for Jesus, an earnest zeal in His work. . . .**

How much need there is for the people of God at this time to consider the words of the Majesty of heaven, and carefully review the ground over which they have traveled, and see and understand where the very first step was taken in the wrong path! Absence of zeal and devotion, of earnest willing service in the cause of God, shows how indolent many professed followers of

Christ are, how destitute of earnest, heartfelt effort. They might have been going on from strength to strength, from light to still greater light. **They might have become strong in faith had they walked on from step to step, thinking more of Christ than of themselves.**

Christ expects more than we are giving

The Lord has a right to expect more of His believing children than they give Him. Every individual Christian is indeed the light of the world. Christians connect with Christ. They reflect the character of Christ. They have been entrusted with great treasures of light; the oracles of God have been given to them, and in these they have been thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Every provision has been made, and why have the individual members

of the church wearied of their Lord? . . . His church whose individual members are advancing, growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, is the elected means of the Redeemer's system for enlightening and saving the world.¹

Are we Christians—Christlike in spirit, in word, in disposition—or are we falling continually under the temptations of the enemy, with no power to escape from his snare? Every life is a sermon, telling either for good or for evil. A true, noble life tells more for Christ than do the most powerful discourses.

One of the chief reasons that so few sinners are won to Christ is that so much of self mingles with the words and acts of His professed followers. Their daily life witnesses against Him; therefore sinners are not converted. Actions speak louder than words, and the actions of many of Christ's followers reveal self, self, self. Every day the Saviour is grieved by their misrepresentation of Him. In spirit and word and manner they say of him, "I know not the Man." The sermons preached against Him by their lives counteract the influence of the sermons preached for Him in the pulpit.

The Saviour is grieved by the dissension, the lack of love, seen among His people. He says to them, You have left your first love, and unless you repent, unless you humble yourselves as a little child, and seek my guidance, I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of its place.

"Thou hast left thy first love." This is the secret of the lack of power in our churches. If those who have received such great truth would live this truth, they would have no time to quarrel, no time to do that which bears the testimony, "I know not the Man."²

Which way are we actually going?

Those who have been growing in harmony with the world in custom, in practice, in thoughts, are not growing in grace. Their prayers become less and less fervent and intelligent. They seem lifeless, and cold, and dead. They must repent. They are called upon to be inwardly grieved and ashamed and confused before the Lord for their want

God has shown it to be our duty not to live for ourselves. Christ pleased not Himself.

of love. They should blame themselves, and humbly confess before God, and condemn themselves. They must come back, retrace their steps, and do the first works; take hold again firmly in faith where they let go, recover their first zeal, their conscientious, tender love for God and His precious truth. They must pray as earnestly, and watch as diligently, as when the light of Christ's forgiving, pardoning love first fell upon their souls. A severe threatening from God follows if this work is not done. "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place. . . .

It's time to turn around!

The only way to grow in grace is to be interestedly doing the very work Christ has enjoined upon us to do—interestedly engaged to the very extent of our ability to be helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them. This is the only way we can grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christians who are constantly growing in earnestness, in zeal, in fervor, in love—such Christians never backslide. They are becoming more closely identified with the Saviour in all His plans. They are partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. . . .

Those who are ever pressing a little closer to the world, and becoming more like them in feelings, in plans, in ideas, have left a space between them and the Saviour, and Satan has pressed his way into this space, and low, worldly-tainted, selfish plans become interwoven with their experience. . . .

Turn quickly to Jesus Christ. Yield your pride, your self love, your selfish aspirations, your love of the world, which are death to spirituality. Repent quickly. Delay not in deciding, lest you be too late. **Elevate your soul's aspirations to higher spheres of action in Christian activities. Those who do this are the only class in our churches that**

will grow. They will speedily attain the highest moral efficiency and the clearest spiritual perceptions. They will have unusual vigor and steadiness of faith. They will know how to pray and be persevering and earnest in prayer. And all those who are deeply and interestedly engaged in the salvation of others, are the more surely working out their own souls' salvation with fear and trembling. The piety that does not reveal itself in working interestedly for others will become a form, strengthened, bigoted, self-conceited. Coming in contact with souls for whom Christ has died, seeking to bring them to repentance, and evidencing a love for their souls, will call them out of themselves, so that they will not be exclusively engaged for their own selfish interests, either in temporal pursuits or in spiritual things. God has shown it to be our duty not to live for ourselves. Christ pleased not Himself.

The times of ignorance God winked at, but now, with the blazing light of truth shining all around us, with warnings, with reproofs, with increasing light if we will but open our eyes to see it, there is no excuse of any, even the weakest child of God, that they should not disperse light to the world. . . . Every step you advance upon the path which God forbids, toward your own pleasure and in sin, is a step nearer your destruction. Every act of disobedience to the word of the Lord is exposing you to irreparable loss. **Every moment of ease, of self-indulgence, secured by you in neglecting the divine admonitions and call to duty in earnest work for the Master, is placing you under the power and control of the prince of darkness.** Your candlestick may at any moment be moved out of its place. . . .

What is my duty? What shall I do to save my children and to save many souls from the coming tempest of wrath unmixed with mercy? God claims every power, every capability of action to be invested in the doing of His work. Talents, possessions, everything that

Let us crucify self, that in our hearts may grow up a strong love for Christ and for one another.

is great and noble in man He calls to be exercised in His work. Duty admits no rival, enters into no compromise with any opposing powers. The most precious friends and relatives must not step in between your duty and your God. **The voice of duty is the voice of God in our souls.** Obedience to its claims brings us into living personal agreement with the highest law in the universe—brings man into alliance with God. . . .

Where do I stand?

Let us look closely and critically to ourselves. Are not the vows we entered into at our baptism violated? Are we dead to the world and alive unto Christ? Are we seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God? Is the cable cut which anchored us to the eternal Rock? Are we drifting with the current to perdition? Shall we make no effort to press and urge our passage up stream? Let us not hesitate longer, but vigorously apply the oars; and let us do our first works ere we make hopeless shipwreck.

It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love. Is it worldliness? Is it selfishness? Is it the love of self-esteem? Is it striving to be first? Is it the sin of sensuality that is intensely active? Is it the sin of the Nicolaitans, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness? Is it the misuse and abuse of great light and opportunities and privileges, making boasted claims to wisdom and religious knowledge, while the life and character are inconsistent and immoral? Whatever it is that has been petted and cultivated until it has become strong and overmastering, make

determined efforts to overcome, else you will be lost. It is these cherished sins, abhorrent to God, that make enfeebled moral courage, and leave you to choose to walk apart from God, while you retain a miserable, heartless, outward form. . . .

When we cease to fulfill our mission, when the candlestick refuses to reflect light, and the great truths committed to us individually in trust for the world, are not given to them, then the candlestick will be removed.³

Return to your first experience, when your soul was filled with love for Christ. Gather to your heart the obedience of a faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Obedience to the law of the Lord makes men pure, holy, undefiled. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7). And this law is contained in two great principles—love to God, and love to man. "A new commandment I give unto you," Christ said to His disciples, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35).

O that there might be seen among our people a deep and thorough work of repentance and reformation! O that they would fall on the Rock, and be broken! Let us crucify self, that in our hearts may grow up a strong love for Christ and for one another. Let us bring into the daily experience the instruction contained in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Self must be surrendered to God before there can take possession of the life that strong, steady belief in the truth that is broad and comprehensive; that casts out from the heart all enmity, all petty differences, and transforms coldness into Christlike affection.

Why should not believers love one another? It is impossible to love Christ, and at the same

time act discourteously toward one another. It is impossible to have the Christ-love in the heart, and at the same time draw apart from one another, showing no love or sympathy. The deeper our love for Christ, the deeper will be our love for one another.⁴

Come out of the darkness!

There are times when under adversity and sorrow, the servants of God become discouraged and despondent. They brood over their circumstances, and, contrasting their condition with the prosperity of those who have no thought or care for eternal things, they feel aggrieved. They manifest a spirit of reproach, and murmur and repine at their lot. They seem to consider that God is under special obligation to bless them and prosper their undertakings, and therefore, as they are placed in situations of trial, they grow rebellious, and look with envy on the wicked who flourish in their iniquity. They seem to regard the condition of the transgressor as preferable to their own. These bitter thoughts are suggested to the mind by the deceiver of mankind. It is his delight to stir up rebellion in the breasts of the children of God. He knows it causes them weakness, and is a source of dishonor to their God. He desires us to think that it is a vain thing to serve God, and that those who are unmindful of the claims of Heaven are more favored than those who strive to obey the commandments of God. . . .

The true servant of God will take the suggestions and temptations of Satan to the throne of grace, where peace and submission will flow into the soul. . . .

When we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, we shall have no disposition to murmur at our lot; the praise of God will be welling up in our hearts continually. The solemn responsibilities that God has laid upon us for the salvation of souls will absorb our whole heart and mind, and we shall have no time to talk of our trials and sacrifices. . . .

Now we have the precious privileges of probation. **We have the opportunity**

of laboring in the greatest cause that ever engaged the attention of the servants of God. Let us not spend these valuable moments in discontent at our lot. Let us praise God, and speak often one to another and to all that we meet, of His marvelous truth.⁵

Focusing our thoughts

We are living in the time when Christ is about to close His work of mediation in our behalf. All should now closely examine their hearts to see whether they are in the faith. Instead of indulging doubt and unbelief, they should humble themselves before God, cultivate faith in His word and His work, and labor earnestly for the salvation of souls. It is no time now for caviling, dissension, and disunion. Where these exist, we may know that self is not dead. Those who have received the truth into the heart will be so filled with joy and gratitude, and so absorbed in the desire that others may share its great blessings, that they will lose sight of petty doubts and evil surmisings. **In their disinterested labor for the salvation of souls, they forget self and selfish interests.** Instead of acting the part of Judas the betrayer, or of Peter when he denied his Lord, they earnestly seek to follow the example of Christ, and carry forward the work which He came on earth to do. . . .

Jesus is now looking upon the people for whom He suffered and died, and is saying, What more can I do for my vineyard than I have already done? Can we wish to be free from trials and reproach for the truth's sake? Can we look upon Him whom our sins have pierced, and not be willing to share His humiliation?

Our sins mingled the bitter cup which He drank in our stead, that He might put to our lips the cup of blessing. He endured the cross, despising the shame, that He might reconcile us to God, that whosoever would come unto Him might take of the water of life freely. In view of the cross of Christ, can you, my brethren and sisters, wish or expect to enter His king-

Cease fretting, cease murmuring, cease finding fault, and make melody to God in your hearts.

dom in any other way than through much tribulation? We have a work to do which we have neglected. . . .

The time has come for us to take advance steps. We should beware lest a selfish, covetous spirit shut out the blessing of God. The Lord calls upon us to give of our means to support His cause. He requires more of us than merely the payment of the tithe. The message is to go forth, "Sell that ye have, and give alms." Those who have large farms should begin to cut down their possessions. . . . It is time for those who have large possessions to cut down the principal, that God's work may be extended in foreign lands. Throughout our own country also there are fields that have not yet been entered, and where the truth should be proclaimed. . . .

Those who have not hitherto felt the claims that God has upon them, should now begin to act. God calls for all to act a part in the closing work for sinners. Let every needless ornament, every extravagance, every selfish indulgence, be given up, and let all these little outgoes, these tiny streams, flow into the Lord's treasury. Let us remember continually what Jesus has done for us. He for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. Let us do our duty faithfully, and then trust ourselves and all we have to the hands of God. . . .

If you have been wronged, forget it, and think only of the great mercy, the loving-kindness, the inexpressible love of Jesus. Learn to praise rather than to censure. If you meet with insult and abuse, do not become discouraged, for Jesus met the same. Go forward, doing your work with fidelity. Store the mind with the precious promises of

God's word, and hold sweet communion with Him by frequently repeating them. Cease fretting, cease murmuring, cease finding fault, and make melody to God in your hearts. Think of everything you have to be thankful for, and then learn to praise God. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God."

If all our mourning, and fretting, and complaining were presented before us as written in the book of records, what a sight would we behold! How astonished we would be to see and understand our real thoughts and feelings—naught but unhappy complainings.

I entreat you never to utter one word of complaint. Weave into the warp and woof of your experience the golden threads of gratitude. Contemplate the better land, where tears are never shed, where temptations and trials are never experienced, where losses and reproaches are never known, where all is peace, and joy, and happiness. Here your imagination may have full scope. These thoughts will make you more spiritually minded, will imbue you with heavenly vigor, will satisfy your thirsty soul with living water, and will impress upon your heart the seal of the divine image. You will be filled with hope and joy in believing, and the Comforter will abide with you forever.⁶ *R*

References

- ¹ *The Review and Herald*, June 7, 1887. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ² *Ibid.*, February 24, 1903.
- ³ *Ibid.*, June 7, 1887. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, February 24, 1903.
- ⁵ *The Signs of the Times*, February 3, 1888. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1883. [Emphasis supplied.]



Regaining Your First Love

By Peter D. Lausevic

We often talk about the time when the church had a mighty power and influence in this world and was able to do many wonderful works. It was a time without radio, television, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, or books. It was a time when inventions such as printing presses, automobiles, airplanes, and computer had not even entered the imagination. Yet the gospel went to all the world! Can you imagine preaching the gospel without a single Bible to leave with your flock? Can you imagine quoting from Scriptural passages while no one in the congregation is following along in his or her Bible—because the people don't have any? And yet conversions took place in larger numbers than we ever see today—even with all our technological advances since that time.

The experience of those early Christians is referred to by the apostle Paul when he addressed the believers at Colossae. "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth" (Colossians 1:5, 6). This means that in their time the gospel had reached the entire world! What gave the early Christian church such a power that believers were accused with such comments as: "These that have turned

the world upside down" (Acts 17:6)? Do we want such a power as this?

Why would we want such a power—a power that would move the world and turn it upside down in the eyes of others? Many times we want the glory of being able to say, "Look what we have accomplished!" However, that was not the motive of the early Christians. They remembered the words of Jesus: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and **then shall the end come**" (Matthew 24:14, emphasis supplied). Can you just imagine the end of all sorrow, crying, pain, man-made as well as natural disasters, and all the things to which we are so accustomed? Yes, that is possible if the gospel goes into all the world.

What will it take for us to obtain that same power so that we can finish the work and go home—our real home, as we are only strangers and pilgrims here in this old sinful world? "When those who profess to serve God follow Christ's example; practicing the principles of the law in their daily life; when every act bears witness that they love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves, then will the church have power to move the world."¹

Love in an alabaster box

The power of the early Christians was truly amazing. By the end of the first century (70 years after Pentecost), that small group of people gathered in the upper room expanded so much that with all the persecutions Rome could muster upon them, they numbered over 5 million in the Roman Empire alone.

However, something happened to them, and they began to resort to other means than the pure gospel presentations to reach humanity. As Jesus examined that period of the Christian era, what did He have to say about this group of believers? "I have somewhat against thee, **because thou hast left thy first love**" (Revelation 2:4, emphasis supplied). It is quite simple. They had lost their first love.

What had that first love been like in the beginning? What were they willing to spend on the love of Jesus? We have the example of Mary just before the

Is it possible to love God with all our heart and then despise those with whom we are supposed to worship? Of course not!

crucifixion. "Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7:37, 38). She had obtained this ointment at a great personal sacrifice.² This was no small deed.

Why was she willing to sacrifice so much for no selfish or personal benefit? Jesus also answered that question. "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (verse 47). "When Christ is the object of our affections, those who have received His pardoning love will not stop to calculate the value of the alabaster box of precious ointment."³ This is the key to their success. Their life meant nothing to them, and this is why it was so easy to lay it down.

Do we really love Jesus supremely above anything else in this world? Are we prepared to make the "alabaster box" sacrifice just so that Jesus can have it? Do we want the power of the early church? Are we ready to work in the same manner as they did? "In their work the disciples constantly encountered privation, calumny, and persecution; but they counted not their lives dear unto themselves and rejoiced that they were called to suffer for Christ. Irresolution, indecision, weakness of purpose, found no place in their efforts. They were willing to spend and be spent."⁴

Love one another

How many times I find people telling me how they love God more than anything else in this world and even weep during appeals in meetings. Yet they cannot get along in church capacity! Is it possible to love God with all

our heart and then despise those with whom we are supposed to worship? "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). It is for this reason that our relationship with each other in church capacity is a real testing point when we speak about our love toward God.

When we talk about evangelism we often want the best speakers to present the truth clearly to the world. We want the best in multimedia capabilities so that the truth can be clearly understood and make a definite impact on the hearers. I love using modern technology for the furtherance of the gospel message. This is as the Lord would have it, as expressed to the prophet: "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it" (Habakkuk 2:2). However, all this technology and natural or cultivated abilities alone are not able to accomplish the task of seeing souls converted.

What is the one thing that is needed, that the early church had, that gave this power? "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). This is the real credential in a society where conflicts are constantly flaring up; where ethnic cleansing still happens even in the 21st century; where countries begin to close the borders and enact all types of protectionist laws at any major economic crisis; even where nation rises up against nation and kingdom against kingdom, finally here is a people that cross national and ethnic barriers! Here is a people that know no cultural barriers and disregard all linguistic impediments.

Because this principle was so different from the rest of the world, this idea so unique in the reclusive Jewish mind, Jesus calls it a new law. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye

“Those mentioned . . . as losing their first love were not ranked with open sinners. They had the truth; they were established in the doctrine.”

also love one another” (verse 34). The real question is, Have we really accepted this new commandment in our life?

How is such a love possible? Again, the answer is quite simple. “As [His disciples] were drawn to Christ in greater love, they were drawn to one another.”⁵ Do we love Jesus so much that there are no more national, ethnic, social, linguistic, economic, or personal barriers between us as brethren and sisters? Do we love Jesus so much that we see Jesus in each other?

Many years ago as I was growing up on a farm in Elverta, California, we had to get up really early one morning—before sunrise—to pick the zucchini, since we had not finished all the rows the day before. As we were picking up the squash in the field, the sun began to rise. It was my first distinct memory of the rising sun so early in the morning. I looked directly at the sun in amazement at how I could look straight at it without harming my eyes. After a few moments I went back to work. However, all I could see was the sun. The zucchini plants were the sun. The squash themselves were the sun. The bucket was the sun. My brother and parents were the sun. Everything around me was the sun. I closed my eyes, and all I could see was the sun. Have you seen the sun? Jesus is the Sun of righteousness or the daystar. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). Has He arisen in your life to such an extent that all those barriers we were talking about have disappeared, and all we can see is Jesus in our fellow believers?

“After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their **one desire was the salvation of souls**. They rejoiced in the sweetness of commu-

nion with saints. They were **tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth’s sake**. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By **unselfish words and deeds** they strove to **kindle this love in other hearts**.”⁶

A change in the church

What a wonderful experience we have been talking about! However, an unconscious change came into the church. What sadly changed them into a cold, formal, legalistic group of believers? They gave way to unkind criticism and lost sight of Jesus. The church members became reclusive and so concerned to save themselves that they lost the love for others. “Your interest, and efforts, and anxieties **are for your family and your relatives**. But you have not entertained the idea of reaching out for others around you, overcoming your reluctance to exert an influence outside of a **special circle**. You idolize yours, and shut yourselves within yourselves. **That the Lord may save me and mine is the great burden. This spirit will have to die before you can flourish in the Lord and make spiritual advancement, before the church can grow and souls be added unto them of such as shall be saved.**”⁷

We all have our personal concerns. It is true that we need to save ourselves before we can save others. It is true that we need to work with our families and rescue them from the danger that will affect all humanity. And although “all should have an interest for their relatives,” they “**should not allow themselves to be shut up to them as though they were the only ones whom Jesus came to save.**”⁸

Are we having some of the same problems that caused the early Christians to come to a standstill and paved the way for future apostasy—and

ultimately for the man of sin? “**In the church of God today brotherly love is greatly lacking**. Many of those who profess to love the Saviour neglect to love those who are united with them in Christian fellowship. We are of the **same faith, members of one family, all children of the same heavenly Father, with the same blessed hope of immortality**. . . . The people of the world are watching us to see if our faith is exerting a sanctifying influence upon our hearts. They are quick to discern **every defect** in our lives, **every inconsistency** in our actions. *Let us give them no occasion to reproach our faith.*”⁹ When I see people of the same church unwilling to meet with each other because of ill will or animosities, I wonder if we are preparing for the kingdom of heaven or for the mark of the beast? When the man of sin is in our own heart—cultivated by this spirit of animosity—the natural result will be to accept the mark of the man of sin in the religious world.

Our greatest danger has never been from the outside. The Bible tells us that persecution will be the natural result of walking with Jesus. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). We expect that, and persecution has never hindered the growth of the church. However, there is something more sinister than persecution: It is when envy, suspicion, and evil surmising occur among professed believers. How perilous it is to say things in just such a way to cause someone to doubt the integrity of others—especially ministers or other workers. By doing this we weaken ourselves and actually hinder the progress of the gospel message.

Does this type of work bring us happiness and peace? Quite the contrary. “**To build up one another** in the most holy faith is a **blessed work**; to **tear down** is a work full of **bitterness and sorrow**.”¹⁰ Grumbling and complaining have no joy in them. Finding solutions has not only joy but also a deep sense of fulfillment.

Need of reproof

Because of their unconscious departure from love to one another, what did the early believers need? Remember,

The best way to help ourselves is to begin helping others.

“Those mentioned . . . as losing their first love were **not ranked with open sinners. They had the truth; they were established in the doctrine; they were firm to condemn and resist evil.**”¹¹ Yet they needed to be reproved for their departure and to be reminded of how they used to behave. This is not a cold, formal type of reproof we are talking about—we are talking about a reproof that provides a solution!

Like the church at Ephesus, we as a church have the truth. We have the pure doctrines of present truth. We condemn open sin. Yet something is missing. The early believers began to lose love for souls for whom Christ died. Are we so in love with Jesus that we love the souls both inside and outside the church? Having love, doing good “especially unto them who are of the household of faith?” (Galatians 6:10).

Revival

“[The early believers] were **losing their realization of the greatness of the love that God has shown for fallen humanity** by making an infinite sacrifice to redeem them.”¹² Too often we get to the point of actually believing that we are better than another person. How does the Bible refer to such? “Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day” (Isaiah 65:5). We begin by comparing ourselves with the world, then by comparing ourselves to other churches, then comparing ourselves with different parts of our church itself, and finally within the local church itself.

How do I practically regain this realization of the greatness of the love of God for a fallen human being as myself? We must vigilantly watch our words and even our thoughts—and fill the void with the compassion of Christ for frail humanity.

Examine ourselves

To change one’s course is difficult. But the first step is to the **NEED** to change by a really thorough self-examination. (2 Corinthians 13:5.) No one else can do this work for us. It is a personal work.

Yet it is very hard—nearly impossible—to criticize ourselves because “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” We examine ourselves and usually find that we are perfect in every way. Others are at fault, not ourselves. However, we should not despair because the next verse gives us the solution: “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10). The first step in recognizing our need is to invite **the Lord** to search our deceitful hearts: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

Visit the erring

One of the best ways to help ourselves is to help others. The old proverb still stands true today, “The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (Proverbs 11:25). The best way to help ourselves is to begin helping others. “We become overcomers by helping others to overcome, by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.”¹³

“This is the work you have neglected. You have shunned **disagreeable responsibilities** and have not **gone to the erring and visited them, and manifested an interest and love for them, and made yourselves familiar with them. . . . You are not required to cloak sin, but to exercise that pitying love for the erring which Christ has exercised toward you.**”¹⁴

Responsibility in restoration

When someone does wrong, it is not enough just to say “I am sorry.” The Bible clearly teaches that there is a work of restoration to do. “If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die” (Ezekiel 33:15). That means that if I have injured

someone’s reputation by my words, it is my responsibility to apologize not only to him or her, but to take action by finding those I had spoken to and rectify what I have said so that the reputation of that person can be placed in the right perspective. This is what it means to get ready for the outpouring of the Latter Rain. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1).

Conclusion

What happens when this love to one another is a reality? “**If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us**” (1 John 4:12).

Do you remember when you first surrendered your life to Jesus as your personal Saviour? Do you remember how you felt about everyone around you? Do you remember how you desired to attend every single meeting of the church? Do you remember how you actually enjoyed every meeting—how you eagerly listened to every testimony presented? Then “**Remember** therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5). “God is now calling for **heartfelt repentance** and for a **return** to the love that we **once manifested toward one another.**”¹⁵ ❧

References

¹ *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 340.

² See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 559.

³ *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 485.

⁴ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 595.

⁵ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

⁶ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 547. [Emphasis supplied.]

⁷ *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 77. [Emphasis supplied.]

⁸ *Ibid.* [Emphasis supplied.]

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 242. [Emphasis supplied.]

¹⁰ *The Review and Herald*, February 25, 1904.

[Emphasis supplied.]

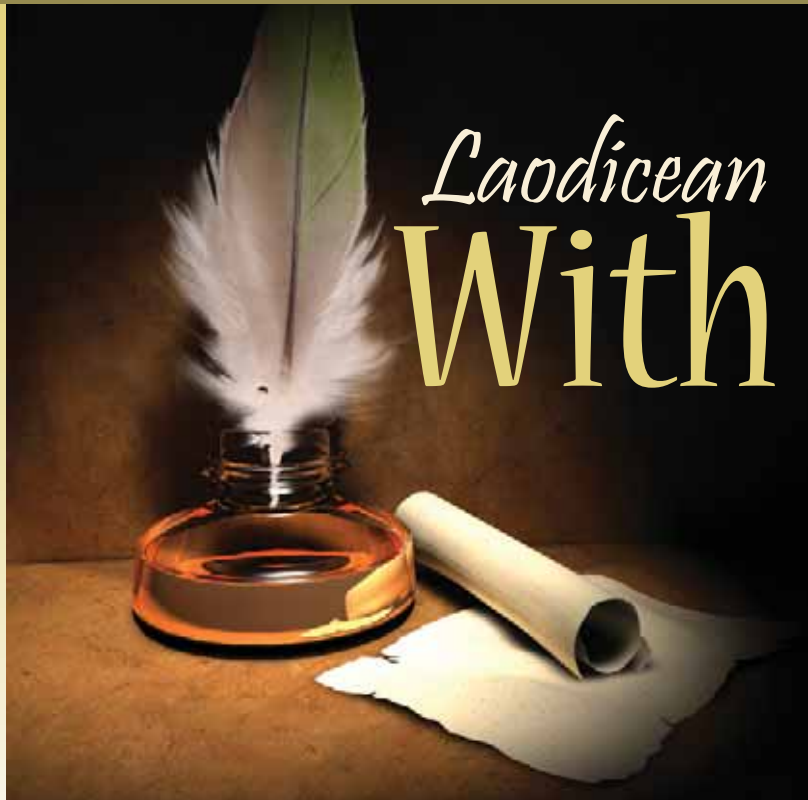
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¹³ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 7, p. 974.

¹⁴ *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 75, 76. [Emphasis supplied.]

¹⁵ *The Review and Herald*, February 25, 1904. [Emphasis supplied.]



Laodicean With Love

By Davi P. Silva

not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus answered with very clear words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:5, 6). And in His intercessory prayer registered in John 17, Christ declared: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (verse 6).

We should consider that "name" in the Bible has much to do with character. In other words, Christ was saying that He had revealed the Father's character during His whole life on earth. He had "glorified" the Father. Glory is another word that refers to character. Christ had glorified God in everything. He had perfectly reflected the divine character during His ministry. He is the perfect representation of the Father. He said to Philip: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Thus He is indeed the Faithful and True Witness.

The Beginning (or Source) of the creation of God

This is the third title applied to Christ in this letter. The King James Version of the Bible is not the best text for this expression, which has been misinterpreted by the Arians. They say that Christ was the first created being. This interpretation contradicts other plain Bible verses that identify Christ as the Creator.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1,

The letter sent by the True Witness, Jesus Christ, to the angel of the Laodicean church is indeed a letter of love. As we consider some points mentioned in the letter, we find the Lord's concern for the salvation of the Laodicean people.

Let us consider the letter itself:

"Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I

rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:14–22, emphasis added).

The most important Person mentioned in this letter is the Author: Jesus Christ. There are at least three titles applied to Christ in the introduction of the letter: Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

The Hebrew word *Amen* means "to make firm," "to found, to prop up, to build"; "confirm," "so be it."

The Faithful and True Witness

This is the second title of Christ used in this letter. Jesus is the only One who can testify about the character of the Father. He is faithful and true. When Thomas asked Him: "Lord, we know

Laodiceans think themselves better than they really are—especially when comparing themselves with others in the faith.

3). In verse 14, the inspired writer declares that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” clearly affirming that the Word who was God became human in the person of Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Colossian believers, Paul also makes it clear that Christ created everything: “By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (1:16). In Hebrews chapter 1, Paul also writes about Christ, saying: “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (verse 10).

The New International Version (NIV) puts Revelation 3:14 this way, in reference to Christ: “the ruler of God’s creation.” And the New English Bible uses the expression “the prime source of all God’s creation.”

“If Christ made all things, He existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity. God over all, blessed forevermore.”¹

As our Creator, Christ wants to fill us with His goodness and love. His plan is for us to reflect the glory of His character. How do we often fall short of that aim—especially today, in this era of Laodicea?

Missing the mark: The snare of a Laodicean self-righteousness

In Revelation 3:15, 16, Christ begins to describe the diagnosis of the Laodicean people: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot; I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

A spiritually lukewarm person is an indifferent one. He or she is not in favor or against something. On the contrary, he or she has no position but rather goes with the current.

Continuing with His diagnosis, Christ adds: “Because thou sayest, I am

rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (verse 17).

“The church is like the unproductive tree which, receiving the dew and rain and the sunshine, should have produced an abundance of fruit, but on which the divine Searcher finds *nothing but leaves*. Solemn thought for our churches! solemn indeed for every individual! Marvelous is the patience and forbearance of God, but ‘except thou repent,’ it shall be exhausted; the churches, our institutions, will go from weakness to weakness, from cold formality to deadness, while they are saying, ‘I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.’ The True Witness says, ‘And *knowest* not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.’ Will they ever see clearly their true condition?”

“There is to be in the churches a wonderful manifestation of the power of God, but it will not move upon those who have not humbled themselves before the Lord and opened the door of the heart by confession and repentance. In the manifestation of that power which lightens the earth with the glory of God, they will see only something which in their blindness they think dangerous, something which will arouse their fears, and they will brace themselves to resist it. Because the Lord does not work according to their ideas and expectations, they will oppose the work. ‘Why,’ they say, ‘should not we know the Spirit of God when we have been in the work for so many years?’ Because they did not respond to the messages, the warnings, and entreaties of the Lord, but persistently said, ‘I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.’ Talent, long experience, will not make men channels of light, unless they place themselves under the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and are called, and chosen, and prepared by the endowment of the Holy Spirit.”²

The way the Laodiceans see themselves is totally different than the way Christ sees them. They consider their spiritual condition in the best light possible: Rich, increased with goods, and having need of nothing, while Christ declares that they are wretched, miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. But Christ mentions something very important in His diagnosis—that they “**know not**” their actual condition.

The main problem in regard to the spiritual condition of the Laodiceans is that they do not know the reality of their state. They think themselves better than they really are—especially when it comes to comparing themselves with their brethren and sisters in the faith.

“Those who think and speak evil of their fellow laborers, opening the mind to false reports, and taking up a reproach against their neighbor, grieve the Spirit of God, and put Christ to open shame. I feel so saddened, so discouraged, by the thought that God’s servants are willing to listen to and circulate hearsay. I know that the Holy Spirit will not cooperate with those who, by their criticisms, their evil surmisings, and their hard-heartedness, are helping Satan. God says to them, ‘Thou hast left thy first love. . . . Repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly.’ I will not bear long with your perverse spirit, which leads you to cherish envy and evil surmising. ‘I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent’ (Revelation 2:4, 5). Do not these words, so plain and decided, call for serious thought and earnest study on the part of everyone who claims to believe the Word of God? ‘Thou hast left thy first love.’ And the dryness and coldness of heart are revealed by a lack of that Christian courtesy, that kindness and tenderness, which is seen in the life of the true Christian.

“On one occasion, on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem, Christ passed a fig orchard. He was hungry, ‘and see-

“If love for Christ in the heart is dull, the love for those whom Christ died will degenerate.”

ing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon.’ The tree presented an appearance of fruitfulness, but upon searching its branches, from the lowest bough to the topmost twig, Jesus found ‘nothing but leaves’ (Mark 11:13). It was a mass of pretentious foliage, nothing more. Today Christ comes to His people, hungering to find in them the fruits of righteousness. But many, many, have nothing but leaves to offer Him. They have left their first love, and upon them has fallen spiritual blindness, hardness of heart, stubbornness of mind. They pray to God, and present Bible truth to the people; for they are in the habit of doing so; but they have lost that which would make their service acceptable. How blind they are! how defective their service! Boastingly they say, ‘I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.’ But God says to them, ‘Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked! I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.’

“Will God’s people accept this reproof? Let them beware of remaining in their present condition; for time is fast passing, and the work that ought to be done is not done. How unlike Christ we are in word and spirit, and in our attitude toward one another! His gentleness should make us ‘kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another’ (Romans 12:10). As a people who have had great light we stand before God under condemnation unless we fulfill the Saviour’s purpose for us, holding fast to Him, and allowing Him to send through our religious experience a warm current of unselfish love. When we do this, our spiritual strength will show that we are living in close connection with the Life-giver. We shall impart grace for the grace that we receive.”³

The only solution

Christ offers a remedy for all the spiritual maladies that plague the Laodicean believers. For their wretchedness, He offers “gold tried in the fire.” For their blindness, He offers eyesalve. For their nakedness, He offers white raiment.

There is indeed a remedy for all the problems mentioned in the letter, but we need to know our own spiritual condition. We need to recognize our spiritual poverties; we need to realize our spiritual blindness, we need to see our nakedness. Then the remedy offered by Christ is available.

The gold tried in the fire is faith and love. The eyesalve is the spiritual discernment offered by the Holy Spirit, and the white raiment is the righteousness of Christ—His perfect obedience to God’s Law, His perfect character that He developed during His earthly life of 33 years, and His vicarious death on the cross of Calvary.

How can we obtain these precious treasures offered by Christ?

In Matthew 16:24, Christ puts the main condition for us to receive an ample entrance in His kingdom: “If any man **will** come after me, let him **deny himself**, and **take up his cross**, and **follow me**” (emphasis supplied).

In other words, we need to be willing to deny ourselves, to renounce everything that is contrary to God’s will, to sacrifice our sinful desires, and to follow Christ in the way of self denial.

In regard to the sealed ones—the 144,000—the apostle John declares that “they . . . follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Revelation 14:4). These follow Christ on earth before they can follow Him in heaven. Are we preparing ourselves to be part of that number? Let us see:

“A thoroughgoing Christian draws his motives of action from his deep heart-love for his Master. Up through the roots of his affection for Christ come faith and an unselfish interest in those around him. The selfish desire to be first is quenched. There is no hatred in his

thoughts, because there is no hatred in his heart. He has the faith that works by love and purifies the soul. The refining influence of the Saviour’s life refreshes and invigorates his spiritual life. By his loyalty to his brethren he shows that he realizes the value of souls. He can pray with the spirit and with the understanding also. His zeal, his staunch adherence to principle, his devotion to all that is pure, honest, just, and of good report, make him companionable, and helpful to those with whom he associates.”⁴

“None but God can subdue the pride of man’s heart. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot regenerate ourselves. In the heavenly courts there will be no song sung, To me that loved myself, and washed myself, redeemed myself, unto me be glory and honor, blessing and praise. But this is the keynote of the song that is sung by many in this world. They do not know what it means to be meek and lowly in heart; and they do not mean to know this, if they can avoid it. The whole gospel is comprised in learning of Christ His meekness and lowliness.

“What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.”⁵

“The righteousness which Christ taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. Sinful men can become righteous only as they have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him.”⁶

“The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all the fullness dwells. ‘For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and

to revive the heart of the contrite ones' (Isaiah 57:15).⁷

Christ finishes His letter to the Laodiceans with a very kind invitation: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

He asks us to hear His voice, to open the door of our heart and life, and then He promises: "I will come in to him, I will sup with him, and he with me."

To which individuals does the message to the Laodiceans apply?

"To the idlers in the Lord's vineyard the Laodicean message is sent. . . .

"The message to the Laodicean church is applicable to all who have had great light and many opportunities, and yet have not appreciated them. . . .

"How plainly is pictured the position of those who think they have all the truth, who take pride in their knowledge of the Word of God, while its sanctifying power has not been felt in their lives. The fervor of the love of God is wanting in their hearts, but it is this very fervor of love that makes God's people the light of the world. . . .

"The message to the Laodicean church applies most decidedly to those whose religious experience is insipid, who do not bear decided witness in favor of the truth."⁸

"The message to the Laodicean church comes home to those who do not apply it to themselves."⁹

"Love of self excludes the love of Christ. Those who live for self are ranged under the head of the Laodicean church who are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot. The ardor of the first love has lapsed into a selfish egotism. The love of Christ in the heart is expressed in the actions. If love for Christ is dull, the love for those for whom Christ has died will degenerate. There may be a wonderful appearance for zeal and ceremonies, but this is the substance of their self-inflated religion. Christ represents them as nauseating to His taste.

"Let us thank the Lord that while this class is so numerous, there is still time for repentance."¹⁰

"There is hope for our churches if they will heed the message to the Laodiceans."

A message to a perishing world

"The Laodicean message has been sounding. Take this message in all its phases and sound it forth to the people wherever Providence opens the way. Justification by faith and the righteousness of Christ are the themes to be presented to a perishing world."¹¹

A message full of encouragement

"The counsel of the true Witness does not represent those who are lukewarm as in a hopeless case. There is yet a chance to remedy their state, and the Laodicean message is full of encouragement; for the backslidden church may yet buy the gold of faith and love, may yet have the white robe of the righteousness of Christ, that the shame of their nakedness need not appear. Purity of heart, purity of motive, may yet characterize those who are halfhearted and who are striving to serve God and mammon. They may yet wash their robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb."¹²

"There is hope for our churches if they will heed the message given to the Laodiceans."¹³

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¹ *The Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

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³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 456.

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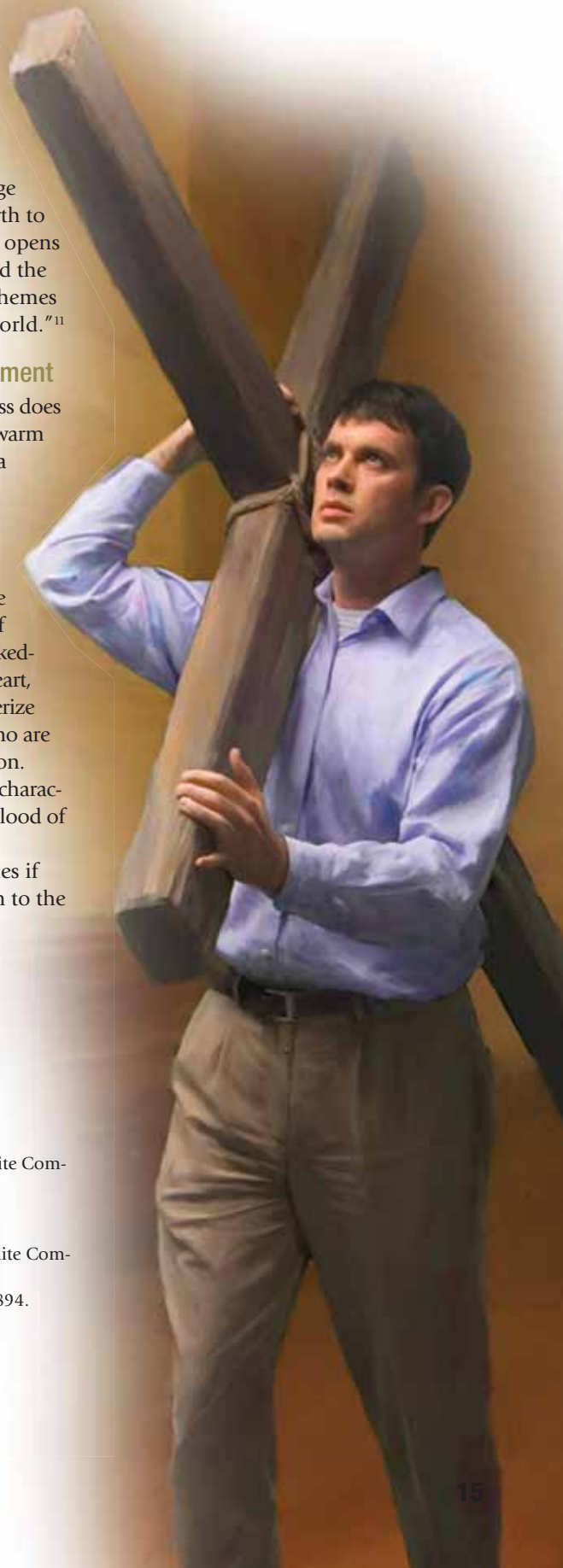
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Heating Up Your Experience!



By P. Balbach

Many Christians “fizzle out” of their experience and fall into a dormant state known as the “Laodicean condition.” Satan is very happy when we are really busy—even with church activities—and have no time for the personal study and spiritual growth that would lead to a personal experience with our Friend and Saviour Jesus Christ. In reality, a “standstill” position actually means that we are retreating, since the Christian life must be continuously on the move; there must be continual progress in order for us to reach eternal life.

Before we can be strong in the Lord and heat up our Christian experience, we must recognize our condition. Even though we may not feel weak, we should never feel too sure of ourselves. The apostle Paul said “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Paul was speaking about the danger of being proud and self-sufficient. Unless the character is changed into the divine similitude, we will have no entrance into

the kingdom of God. Do you recognize your true spiritual condition? Are you seriously striving for entrance into the heavenly kingdom—or are you satisfied with the pleasures of the earthly kingdom?

Are you like the young rich man who was too selfish to share his possessions with the poor, thus forfeiting the kingdom of heaven? (Matthew 19:22.)

Are you like Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, who “went out to see the daughters of the land” (Genesis 34:1) and lost her Christian experience as a result?

Are you too “pure” like the priest and the Levite, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, to care for the dying needs of their “unclean” neighbor?¹

Are you like Samson who disregarded his parents’ counsel and married outside of his faith and lost his Christian experience?

Are you like the mother of James and John, the wife of Zebedee, who was so ambitious for her sons’ highest place in the kingdom, that the only kingdom she cared about was the earthly kingdom?

Are you like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan—“too pure” to care for the needs of your dying neighbor?

Are you a “Peter” who was so self-sufficient that he declared confidently to the Lord that he was ready to go “both into prison, and to death” (Luke 22:33)? “His self-confidence proved his ruin.”²

Are you a “Nicodemus” who was “too proud openly to acknowledge himself in sympathy with the Galilean Teacher?”³

Are you a ceremonial Christian like the scribes and Pharisees, thinking that your self-righteousness will give you an entrance into the kingdom of heaven? (Matthew 5:20.)

How is it that we become spiritually weak?

Let us look at the main reasons why Christians become spiritually weak:

1. Neglecting to watch and pray.

Life is so extremely busy nowadays. There is so much to be done and so little time in which to do it. Yet there is an old saying, “If the devil can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy.” And what is the result? We run around so much—busy, busy, busy. At least we are not lazy, right? But working hard is not an end in itself. Even if we are doing good things for God, it is still possible to become so busy in the work of the Lord that we forget about the Lord of the work. The bottom line is this: Do not neglect to watch and pray. There is an enemy on our track, and if we are not watching, he can readily ensnare us with his subtle temptations. If we are not praying for strength and wisdom from heaven, the earthly elements of life can easily drag us downward.

Jesus bids us: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

“Neglect of prayer causes the Christian to become weak, to lose self-control, to give rein to impure thoughts and impulses.”⁴

“The fear of the Lord is fading from the minds of our youth because of their neglect of Bible study.”⁵

2. Failing to cherish the light.

Human nature tends to justify itself by sticking to old habits and familiar paths. But God wants to sanctify us;

He is calling us to higher ground than we have ever experienced before. As we appreciate and cherish the light of His word, He will inspire us to new heights and to enjoy purer, holier lives through His strength.

“Our natural tendencies, unless corrected by the Holy Spirit of God, have in them the seeds of moral death. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we cannot resist the unhallowed effects of self-indulgence, self-love, and temptation to sin.”⁶

3. Looking in the wrong direction.

“Many are spiritually weak because they look at themselves instead of at Christ.”⁷

Believers “become weak and inefficient by making flesh their arm. Trust in the wisdom of man does not facilitate growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ.”⁸

Our spiritual fortitude comes from Heaven. Mere humanity—whether our own or that of other mortals—is powerless to give us victory in Christ.

4. Yielding to temptation.

“He who once yields to temptation becomes spiritually weak and yields more readily the second time.”⁹

Every time we yield to the ploys of the enemy, we are weakened. But on the other hand, every time we courageously resist temptation, we gain more strength.

5. Exalting self.

This planet is corrupt because its inhabitants have been duped by one who has long been proud of his beauty, intelligence, talent, and executive ability. Knowing this history, how can we be so foolish as to continue the cycle? Let us wake up and realize that we were born in enemy-occupied territory. Self-exaltation is in the air we breathe. We need to make a concerted effort to escape its foul miasma and imitate

instead the life, example, and attitude of Jesus Christ.

“By self-exaltation we become weak and invite the temptations of the enemy. Our safety is to practice heartily the truths of the Bible. By humbling ourselves before God we invite His saving power.”¹⁰

6. Failing to faithfully perform every Christian duty.

The enemy delights in getting us to underestimate the importance of duty. He paints a smooth, easy picture. Yet, “if you do not obtain spiritual strength by the faithful performance of every Christian duty, thus coming into a closer and more sacred relation to your Redeemer, you will become weak in moral power.”¹¹

7. Blocking the light that should go to the world.

The wonderful light of the gospel message has not been entrusted to us in order that we might become puffed up with a “holier-than-thou” attitude. In fact, it is not exclusively for us at all. It is designed for sharing with every person on the earth. Are we so thick with self that we are blocking the view? Are we failing to energetically take this glorious message to the world?

“Many are spiritually weak because they have not let the light which God has given them shine forth to the world. They have not connected with Christ and become channels of blessing.”¹²

Be strong in the Lord

The apostle Paul said: “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10). To be spiritually strong, we must have an experience opposite to that which makes us weak. Here are some active steps we should take:

Seek the Holy Spirit

Now is the time for the latter rain to be poured out in fullness—without

“Again and again we must raise our eyes to Him who has been lifted up upon the cross.”

measure. Why not beseech the Lord earnestly for this promised blessing. What are we waiting for?

“Christ has made every provision for us to be strong. He has given us His Holy Spirit, whose office is to bring to our remembrance all the promises that Christ has made.”¹³

“The Holy Spirit imparts love, joy, peace, strength, and consolation; it is as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. The blessing is free to all.”¹⁴ “The Holy Spirit is present to give strength for victory.”¹⁵

Revive our prayer life

Secret prayer ignites the individual with peace and inner strength.

“Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18).

“The patriarchs were men of prayer, and God did great things for them. . . .

“Joseph prayed, and he was preserved from sin amid influences that were calculated to lead him away from God. . . .

“Moses, who was much in prayer, was known as the meekest man on the face of the earth. . . . [He] went to the true Source of power. . . .

“Daniel was a man of prayer, and God gave him wisdom and firmness to resist every influence that conspired to draw him into the snare of intemperance. Even in his youth he was a moral giant in the strength of the Mighty One.”¹⁶

Besides personal prayer, family prayer fortifies the home, and prayer among the congregation invigorates the entire body of Christ.

Here we are assembled at the annual Week of Prayer. Can we not make this a Week of Prayer unlike any other we have ever held? This time, why not let this be a real “upper room” experience where differences are put away and hearts are united as never before?

“Seasons of prayer should be held for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

“Could there be a convocation of all the churches on earth, the object of

their united cry should be for the Holy Spirit. When we have that, Christ our sufficiency is ever present, we shall have every want supplied. We shall have the mind of Christ.

“God will not do for man that which He requires man shall do for himself through his own earnest willing cooperation. . . .

“Time and time again the Lord has longed to communicate His Spirit in rich measure, but there was no place for Him to rest. He was not recognized or valued. The blindness of mind, the hardness of hearts interpreted Him as something of which they should be afraid. Some hidden evil lurks in the heart to hinder the manifestation of the power of God, and His Spirit cannot descend. . . .

“When God’s people will believe, when they will turn their attention to that which is true, and living, and real, the Holy Spirit, in strong heavenly currents, will be poured upon the church.”¹⁷

Feed upon the Word daily

There is a pitiful syndrome that exists in this world known as anorexia nervosa. The victim of this sad condition chooses to partake of so little food that he (or, more often, she) eventually becomes emaciated with hunger and suffers from many health issues due to lack of adequate nutrition. The greatest tragedy is that the problem is self-inflicted; it could easily be avoided. Too often it occurs because the victim is obsessed with portraying a slender outward image at the expense of intelligent reason.

Scripture prophesies a famine. Are we deliberately starving ourselves into spiritual leanness by minimizing our time with the bread of life—God’s written word? If so, why? Where have our priorities gone? Are we so preoccupied with an exaggerated concept of outward needs that we are neglecting the essential inward adorning of the Spirit of Christ and how it grows?

“Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

“The food we eat at one meal does not satisfy us forever. We must daily partake of food. So we must daily eat the Word of God that the life of the soul may be renewed. In those who feed constantly upon the Word, Christ is formed, the hope of glory. A neglect to read and study the Bible brings spiritual starvation.”¹⁸

Trust in God

“So long as we surrender the will to God and trust in His strength and wisdom, we shall be guided in safe paths to fulfill our appointed part in His great plan. But the one who depends upon his own wisdom and power is separating himself from God.”¹⁹

“Your strength is wholly in God—in your simple, entire trust in God.”²⁰

“If we make God our strength, we shall have clear perceptions of duty and unselfish aspirations; our life will be actuated by a noble purpose, which will raise us above sordid motives.”²¹

Look to Calvary

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

“As, seeing the sinfulness of sin, we fall helpless before the cross, asking forgiveness and strength, our prayer is heard and answered. Those who present their petitions to God in Christ’s name will never be turned away.”²²

“There is no limit to the help that the Saviour is willing to bestow on us. He asks us to bring into our lives the grace that will keep us from sin. From the cross of Calvary there comes to us liberty, hope, and strength.”²³

Continue daily in well doing

“To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Romans 2:7).

“Look not anxiously into the morrow. Today employ your time to the very best account. Today let your light shine for Christ, even in the perfor-

mance of little duties. . . . The faithful performance of today's duties will prepare you to take hold of tomorrow's work with fresh courage, saying, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped me' (1 Samuel 7:12)! Ever stand as minuter-men before God."²⁴

Scatter the seed of truth

It is not enough to do missionary work when and where it is convenient. We must be willing to spend and be spent. We must be willing to sacrifice our time, means, and even family relations in order to be effective soul winners. See what Inspiration tells us: "Many of the members of our large churches are doing comparatively nothing. They might accomplish a good work if, instead of crowding together, they would scatter into places that have not yet been entered by the truth. Trees that are planted too thickly do not flourish. They are transplanted by the gardener, that they may have room to grow and not become dwarfed and sickly. The same rule would work well for our large churches. Many of the members are dying spiritually for want of this very work. They are becoming sickly and inefficient. Transplanted, they would have room to grow strong and vigorous."²⁵

God also has ways of lovingly turning up the heat!

The Lord declares: "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God" (Zechariah 13:9).

"By trial the Lord proves the strength of His children. Is the heat strong to bear? Is the conscience void of offense? Does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God? This the Lord ascertains by trying us. In the furnace of affliction He purifies us from all dross. He sends us trials, not to cause needless pain, but to lead us to look to Him, to strengthen our endurance, to teach us that if we do not rebel, but

put our trust in Him, we shall see of His salvation."²⁶

The apostle Paul said: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The Lord sends us trials that our faith may be exercised. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:35-37).

"Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed."²⁷

"We shall have trials of faith, but they will only tend to increase our spiritual sinew and muscle; for we shall have to exercise faith, and put forth our trembling hand to lay hold upon a 'Thus saith the Lord.' But in this way we shall bring honor and glory to God. The doubts and fears against which we have been called to struggle are the precious trials of our faith, God's workmen that work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Again and again we must raise our eyes to Him who has been lifted up upon the cross. 'Look and live,' were the words that were echoed throughout the encampment of Israel when the brazen serpent was erected. This required an act of faith on the part of the suffering victims who had been bitten by the fiery serpents, but they were assured that if they did look, they should live. We also are to look and live."²⁸ *R*

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ON FIRE FOR JESUS



by Liviu Tudoroiu

That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.

They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

... Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim" (Isaiah 49:9, 12).

There has never been a nobler assignment given to us feeble human beings as the call to discipleship. To be a missionary is to perceive the pain and suffering of those around us as being more severe than our own. This is what awakens conscience to sense the empty and solitary heart of a starving soul. This is what will make a person a better-fitted missionary, through a continual denial of his or her own needs and a continue regard for the sufferings and needs of others.

To be on fire for Christ is one of the most sensitive theological subjects in religious circles, and due to the

variety of perceptions, the title may require a few points of clarification in order to set the stage for sound understanding.

Case 1. Religious Zeal

Religious zeal may often be considered an indication of genuine conversion. The question that needs to be addressed is: Conversion to what or to whom? When a soul experiences behavioral and emotional changes, we call that conversion. We should not forget that, besides the major changes the soul will experience, the perception of reality is modified as well. The way of thinking, the way of looking at things, take a different direction and are now perceived in a different light. Many people experience a theological conversion without a true knowledge of Christ. We can change our views in different theological matters without necessarily changing much as far as our relationship with Christ. For instance,

Any noble purpose—any good intention—if not sanctified by the blood of Jesus, will bear the poor stigma of human pride.

to be strictly biblical, I would invite you to contemplate the conversion of John, “the son of thunder.” He accepted the invitation of Christ. He became a follower of Christ, he spent his entire time with Christ, he even became a missionary, he went to preach, he performed some miracles and many other things in behalf of Christ. With all these traits, are we fully convinced of his conversion to Christ? When he and James visited a certain Samaritan village, John was so proud of his Master that he knew that Jesus would handle the preaching according to the divine wisdom. John was convinced that the Samaritans would receive the message. But what a surprise—the villagers rejected the Saviour.

Immediately John and James proposed to Jesus a declaration of war. “Wilt thou that we command **fire to come down from heaven**, and consume them, even as Elias did” (Luke 9:54, emphasis added). Such a mentality is very common in most of the religious and non-religious circles of the world. Was it possible that “John the beloved”—while being with Jesus—was actually being controlled by another power? Was it possible that, as missionaries, John and others were unaware of the spirit that then controlled their actions and emotions? “Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?” they said.

After this supposed act of heroism, John and his brother—another “son of thunder”—were expecting appreciation for their devotion. Instead, Jesus uttered a very uncomfortable truth: “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (verses 55, 56).

John was ready to share the grace of God only with “good people.” He could not take one step farther to accept the fact that manna was falling from heaven for both good and bad people. John may have been perceived as a very faithful believer, even “on fire for Christ,” but his attitude showed the spirit that controlled the entire substance of his intentions. Any noble purpose—any good intention—if not sanctified by the blood of Jesus, will bear the poor stigma of human pride. Religious zeal is

beneficial only when it comes from the Spirit of Christ. Otherwise it will create the same fanaticism that has so often led to religious bigotry and bloodshed.

You may say: “Well . . . John has died, what do we have to do with that?” It is true, that the man called John has died, but the same spirit is at work today to generate religious zeal of the same type. As long as we display the same self-intoxication with pride—the same infatuation—we are powerless to fulfill our duty according to the divine expectation. We may be “on fire,” but if we display in our thinking and behavior the same spirit of intolerance and cruelty as displayed by John, the son of thunder—and as long as we nourish such a mentality in our ranks, the rest of the world will not be impressed with us. The Spirit of Prophecy declares:

“It is no part of Christ’s mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. **Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness**, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas.”¹

Have you unexpectedly found yourself displaying that religious zeal for Christ’s righteousness—that sincere desire—“to correct the thinking” of others in a very forceful and inquisitorial way? I have, and perhaps it took a good time of failure and deception in my spiritual life before I realized the emptiness of my heart, the cosmetics of

my polished hypocrisy, and I fell on the Rock. I understood then the value of human life and the price paid by Someone for the redemption of souls I used to despise.

“Every human being, in body, soul, and spirit, is the property of God. Christ died to redeem all. Nothing can be more offensive to God than for men, through religious bigotry, to bring suffering upon those who are the purchase of the Saviour’s blood.”²

“It is not Christ’s follower that, with averted eyes, turns from the erring, leaving them unhindered to pursue their downward course. Those who are forward in accusing others, and zealous in bringing them to justice, are often in their own lives more guilty than they. Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein.”³

“The darkest chapters of history are burdened with the record of crimes committed by bigoted religionists. The Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham, and boasted of their possession of the oracles of God; yet these advantages did not preserve them from selfishness, malignity, greed for gain, and the basest hypocrisy. They thought themselves the greatest religionists of the world, but their so-called orthodoxy led them to crucify the Lord of glory.

“The same danger still exists. Many take it for granted that they are Christians, simply because they subscribe to certain theological tenets. But they have not brought the truth into practical life.”⁴

Case 2. To whom is much forgiven, the same loveth much

I had a chance to listen to the experience of an old lady that had spent her

“Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, [and] to encourage.”

whole life in the canvassing work, investing her entire personal wealth assisting the poor, and printing books for the entire North American region. In short, she was a great hero in the church. On her deathbed, as a pastor I asked her how she felt about her final days, to which she replied: “Brother, I see that time is against me and I have run out of options. What I am now going to tell you will fully surprise you; I know everybody regards me as a faithful person; I know they want to make a chronicle about my life—but I tell you, Brother” . . . her voice stumbled under a torrent of tears, “I tell you Brother, that . . . I do not know Jesus as a personal Saviour. Yes, I sold books about Christ. Yes, I taught students how to sell books about Him, but I feel I do not know Him personally as a Friend and Saviour.”

Chills went down my spine when I reflected on the nature of her experience, and the very first move of my conscience was to investigate my own relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ. Am I in a similar condition? Is there something to learn from her experience? Is there a bell ringing in my conscience to announce the end of God’s grace for me?

Is there a voice speaking to you as well, my friend? I hope there is. Take the safe side in this situation and listen to the voice of your conscience. If you see the negative reality of your religious life, listen to the Lord. He is offering you, maybe, your last chance. If you believe, He will give you the assurance of sins forgiven and generate in you a sentiment of humbleness and appreciation. As a result, you will be so much **in love with Him**, so much on **fire for Him**, that you will become an instrument in His hand for the salvation of other people in a similar condition. The Lord Jesus Christ wants you to discover the freedom and peace that come from forgiveness through His blood.

Brothers and sisters, young and old, the most successful missionaries are those who are **sure they are forgiven**. Those who are not sure are not necessarily bad people, but they are lacking something—they are not **“on fire for Christ.”** Those who have repented of their failures are usually the most reliable missionaries. To whom is forgiven much loveth much. What qualified Peter to be a missionary was his simple answer to the question Jesus addressed him three times: Simon Peter, son of Jonas . . . do you love Me? His humble answer, Lord you know all things, you know that I love you, qualified Peter for a noble task.

“Jesus, before the assembled disciples, brought out the depth of Peter’s penitence, and showed how thoroughly humbled was the once boasting disciple. **He was now entrusted with the important commission of caring for the flock of Christ.** Though every other qualification might be unexceptionable, yet without the love of Christ he could not be a faithful shepherd over the Christian flock. Knowledge, eloquence, benevolence, gratitude, and zeal are all aids in the good work, but without an inflowing of the love of Jesus in the heart, the work of the Christian minister is a failure.”⁵

He was really **in love with Jesus**; he was **on fire for his Master**. This is what made him say with a powerful and ardent voice: “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

Case 3. Literally “in the fire for Jesus.”

Rome was on fire. Someone conceived a sinister way to persecute the Christians, and many of them were sent to the stake. Rome was literally on fire with human torches for the work of God and for the name of Jesus. On the streets and in the amphitheater, a heavenly melody could be heard: “Nero

. . . we forgive you.” With the last breath of their voice, Christians sealed their lives, leaving behind the legacy of what it really means to be **on fire for Christ**. Their labor in this world testified to the character of Christ reproduced in them to such an extent that they could exclaim: “Nero . . . we forgive you!”

These Christians were capable of forgiving one of the worst human enemies of Christ and His followers. Since Christianity was regarded as treason against the Roman empire, the same fate fell upon Peter, Paul, and millions of Christians who died—“on fire for Jesus.”

“Treason against the Roman government was the crime for which Jesus was condemned, and persons put to death for this offense were consigned to a burial ground especially provided for such criminals.”⁶

“Upon his arrival at Rome, Paul was placed in a gloomy dungeon, there to remain until his course should be finished. Accused of instigating one of the basest and most terrible of crimes against the city and the nation, he was the object of universal execration.”⁷

“In the providence of God, Peter was permitted to close his ministry in Rome, where his imprisonment was ordered by the emperor Nero about the time of Paul’s final arrest. Thus the two veteran apostles, who for many years had been widely separated in their labors, were to bear their last witness for Christ in the world’s metropolis, and upon its soil to shed their blood as the seed of a vast harvest of saints and martyrs.”⁸

“Christians were falsely accused of the most dreadful crimes and declared to be the cause of great calamities—famine, pestilence, and earthquake. As they became the objects of popular hatred and suspicion, informers stood ready, for the sake of gain, to betray the innocent. They were condemned as rebels against the empire, as foes of religion, and pests to society. Great numbers were thrown to wild beasts or burned alive in the amphitheaters. Some were crucified; others were covered with the skins of wild animals and thrust into the arena to be torn by dogs.”⁹

Conclusion

History is full of supposed “heroes” ready to kill in the name of Christ, but few are ready to die for His name. Thus the two major currents of history hinge on the same subject. One class of people, the majority—which in fact are the persecutors—wrote history with ink, while the other class of people, the minority—the persecuted ones—wrote history with their own blood. It is our duty to heed the lessons of history. One day they may be useful to us as well. The time will come when the same kind of scenario will be staged against the people of God. On that day only those who are **on fire for Christ** will stand.

Let me be more specific: To love people above your needs, to love them above your priorities, to love them beyond your pain, beyond your suffering, every day, with the same intensity—this is what I would call “to be **on fire for Jesus**.” This is a constant behavior. It is a state of mind, it is an everyday need, it is a permanent sense of urgency. It is not an emotional eruption but a tender, gentle, everyday smile, showing consistent love for Christ.

“[Many] are consumed by a fiery zeal which is mistaken for religion, but character is the true test of discipleship. Have they the meekness of Christ? have they His humility and sweet benevolence? Is the soul temple emptied of pride, arrogance, selfishness, and censoriousness? If not, they know not what manner of spirit they are of. They do not realize that true Christianity consists in bearing much fruit to the glory of God. . . .

“I have seen a device representing a bullock standing between a plow and an altar, with the inscription, ‘Ready for either’—willing to swelter in the weary furrow or to bleed on the altar of sacrifice. This is the position the child of God should ever be in—willing to go where duty calls, to deny self, and to sacrifice for the cause of truth. The Christian church was founded upon the principle of sacrifice. ‘If any man will come after Me,’ says Christ, ‘let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow

The martyrs were Christians literally “on fire”—still capable of loving, still capable of forgiving their worst human enemy.

Me.’ He requires the whole heart, the entire affections. The exhibitions of zeal, earnestness, and unselfish labor which His devoted followers have given to the world should kindle our ardor and lead us to emulate their example. Genuine religion gives an earnestness and fixedness of purpose which molds the character to the divine image and enables us to count all things but loss for the excellency of Christ. This singleness of purpose will prove an element of tremendous power.”¹⁰

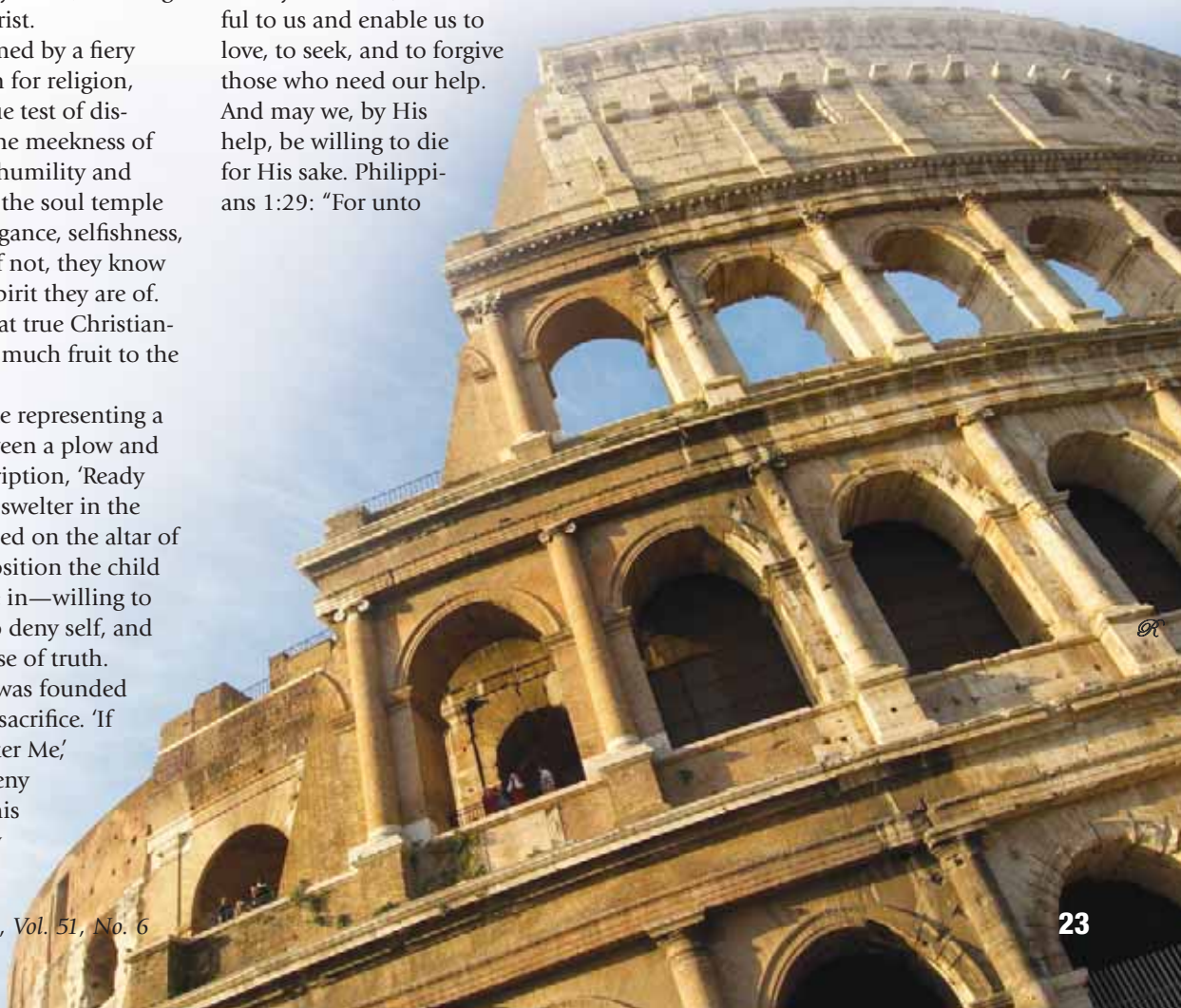
“We are never to get above the simplicity of the work. It is a power in its simplicity. A consistent life, a fervent zeal, a meek and quiet spirit, mingled with a heart overflowing with love for perishing souls, is Bible religion. We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”¹¹

May the Lord Jesus Christ be merciful to us and enable us to love, to seek, and to forgive those who need our help. And may we, by His help, be willing to die for His sake. Philippians 1:29: “For unto

you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” When the trumpet shall sound, may none of us miss the final call. Amen! *R*

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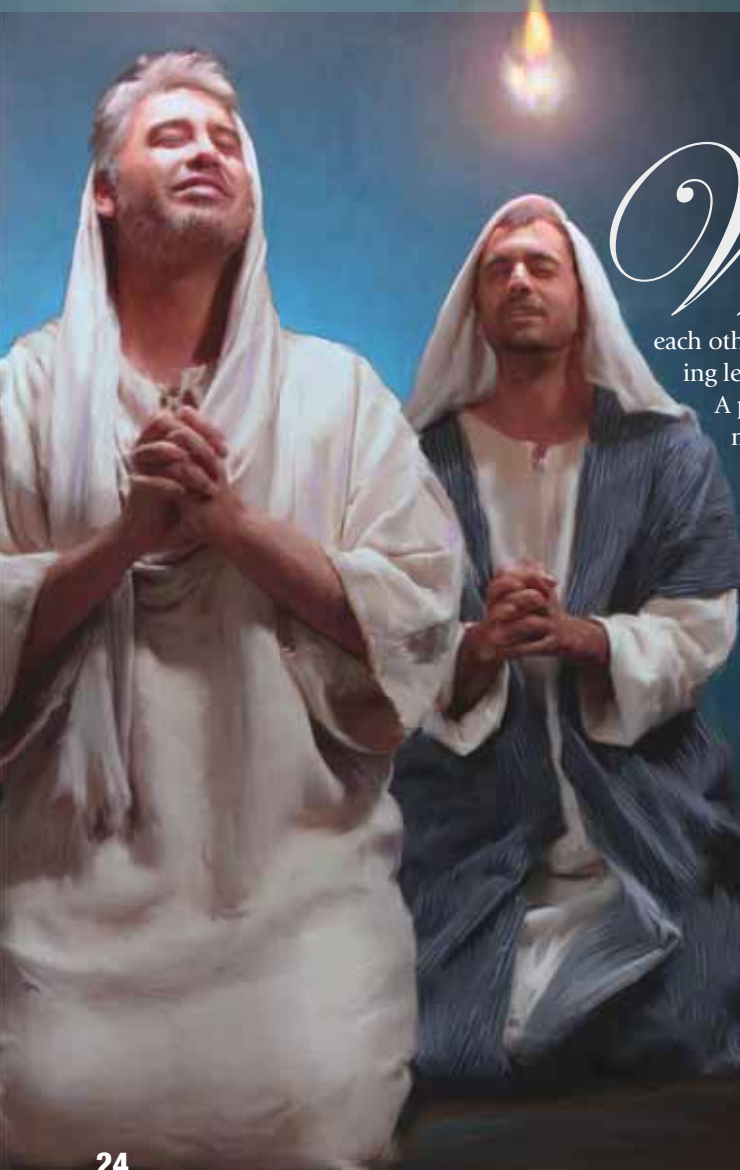
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- ⁵ *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 231. [Emphasis supplied.]
- ⁶ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 773.
- ⁷ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 490.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 537.
- ⁹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 40.
- ¹⁰ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 305–307.
- ¹¹ *Bible Training School*, March 1, 1909.



News Flash:

1,000 Souls a

By D. Sureshkumar



*W*e are constantly looking for new and novel ways to communicate with each other. And it keeps becoming less and less personal.

A personal letter in the mailbox is rare, but my e-mail box stays full. We are a people who want to be heard! Yet, because everyone else is also trying to be heard, communication is becoming more and more difficult. Nonetheless, God never ceases to communicate with His people and He expects His children to communicate with their life and experience the Good News of His saving grace. He wants us to share the good news of souls added to His flock as well.

In the early Christian church there was clearly seen the power of communication accompanying the proclamation of the gospel message—a power derived from the love and godliness planted in the heart of believers truly converted to the doctrine of Christ which was preached and taught by the apostles. There was no trial so severe nor hindrance or sacrifice so great that it could deter the believers from pressing onward, carrying the banner of the cross. Persecution, imprisonment, loss of property, or any other affliction—even martyrdom—was unable to quench the love of Christ burning in their heart. This love gave them assurance of hope in doing the will of God, saving souls from the power of darkness.

First love is that which keeps someone or something foremost above every other person or object. It is zealously expressed to the point that we would even give our life for it. It is that foundation upon which everything else is built.

Likewise, the love kindled in the heart of the faithful believers of the

early church could not be extinguished through opposition, persecution, or confiscation—for they knew that if they should leave their first love for Christ, they would lose their effectiveness as His witness to the world and their usefulness to the Lord.

The first two chapters of Revelation are very Christ-centered, for these are the words of Jesus.

Have you ever gotten a letter from Jesus? If you were ever to receive one in

Day

the mail, you would certainly open it and read it. In this passage of scripture, Jesus writes mail to the churches in Asia.

The church at Ephesus

The early church, represented by the believers in Ephesus, had a strong love at first and had persevered in the faith (Revelation 2:2, 3). They had suffered for Christ's name and had not become spiritually tired. The church had also suffered the attack of false prophets and false teachers who tried to infiltrate among the believers. They were diligent to eliminate all false teachings.

When addressing this church, Jesus commended them for many outstanding qualities (verses 1–3). The church was obedient, energetic, untiring, and upheld sound doctrine, yet they lacked something. Perhaps they might have gone too far in uprooting heresy; somehow, there was a spiritual problem in the church described as a forsaking of the first love (verse 4). While doctrinal purity is important to our faith and spiritual stability, it must not under any circumstances lead to a loveless life or a formal religion. Regardless of other admirable qualities, without love, the soul is withered and void.

Regardless of other admirable qualities, without love, the soul is withered and void.

The Lord then encouraged these believers to repent, and “remember . . . from whence thou hast fallen” (verse 5). The believers had good deeds, but no longer had the same love for each other and for Jesus as it had been at first. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

Jesus' three steps to recovering your first love

Remember your former condition (stop and recall your love in the past; realize your current position and compare it with how you used to be).

Repent (change your direction, stop doing negative things).

Do the things you did at first (do positive things; repentance is not just turning from wrong but also doing what is right).

Repentance does not merely lead us to stop doing evil things but leads us also to learn to do good things (Isaiah 1:16, 17). The fruit of repentance (Matthew 3:8) must appear. “Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. . . . [The sinner] sees the love of God, the beauty of holiness, the joy of purity; he longs to be cleansed and to be restored to communion with Heaven.”¹

What was this “first love” that the Ephesian church had left? In answering this question, we need to go back to Acts chapter 19 and consider the time when the gospel of Jesus Christ first came to the city of Ephesus.

The Good News and the result of hearing it

When we look at this passage, we read of the extraordinary miracles that God was performing through the apostle Paul there. The Bible says that, as the news was spreading about the miraculous things God was doing, and of the gospel of Jesus that Paul was preaching, “fear fell on [all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus], and

the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (verses 17–20).

These Ephesians loved Jesus because of His saving grace. Their love for Him grew and enabled them to freely abandon their former ways. No more magical arts! No more occult practices! No more witchcraft! From then on, they placed their full love and trust in Jesus and in Him alone. In reflecting true love for Him, they threw away everything else and trusted in and depended solely on Him. They gave their life over to Him and served Him as the great object of their love. Thus they gained victory.

This secret of victory empowered them to be amazingly effective witnesses for Christ. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4, 5). “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12).

Empowered to witness

Christ opened the mind of His disciples to the scriptural matters concerning His death and resurrection, while commissioning them to proclaim forgiveness of sins to all nations. Then He said: “Ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:48, 49). John's description of the same encounter includes Christ's command, “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you,” and

"The disciples did not ask for a blessing for themselves. They were weighted with the burden for souls."

breathing on them, He added: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:21, 22).

Two things appear inseparable

There is a link between the commission to witness to all nations and the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit to empower the believers for such a commission. It gives us assurance that we are His children. The objective to witness has an inward and an outward expression, much like two sides of a coin.

The testimony says, "One interest prevailed; one subject of emulation swallowed up all others. The ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom."²

Witnessing to all nations consists of both the revelation of Christ's character and persuasion for the kingdom. The accomplishing of these two tasks is the reason why Jesus poured His Spirit upon the early church, and this is why we need a renewed baptism of the Holy Spirit today.

A sermon without words

It is not only by preaching the truth and distributing literature that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, while a cheap, unchristian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling. Not all the books written can serve the purpose of a holy life. People will believe, not what the minister preaches but what the church lives. Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth.

"When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace takes the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness,

and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God."³

"The mighty power of the Holy Spirit works an entire transformation in the character of the human agent, making him a new creature in Christ Jesus. When a man is filled with the Spirit, the more severely he is tested and tried, the more clearly he proves that he is a representative of Christ. The peace that dwells in the soul is seen on the countenance. The words and actions express the love of the Saviour. There is no striving for the highest place. Self is renounced. The name of Jesus is written on all that is said and done."⁴

A noble life is the most powerful sermon in favor of Christianity. The Spirit of Christ within transforms us into His image. Through the indwelling Spirit, Christ's church will impact the world for God. A Christlike character leads to a Christlike mission to prepare the world for His return. Then we will see a visible growth daily.

The news flash in apostolic times

"The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ."⁵

Peter's first sermon on the Day of Pentecost brought some 3,000 souls to conviction (Acts 2:41). A second apostolic sermon brought 5,000 to Christ (Acts 4:4)! "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Signs and wonders accompanied the believers and "multitudes both of men and women" were constantly added to their number (Acts 5:14), even to the point that priests, maybe their former enemies, were becoming "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

"God will today endow men and women with power from above, as He endowed those who on the Day of Pentecost heard the word of salvation. At this very hour His Spirit and His grace are for all who need them and will take Him at His word.

"Notice that it was after the disciples had come into perfect unity, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out. They were of one accord. All differences had been put away. And the testimony borne of them after the Spirit had been given is the same. Mark the word: 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul' (Acts 4:32). The Spirit of Him who died that sinners might live animated the entire congregation of believers.

"The disciples did not ask for a blessing for themselves. They were weighted with the burden of souls. The gospel was to be carried to the ends of the earth, and they claimed the endowment of power that Christ had promised. Then it was that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted in a day. So it may be now."⁶

With such spirit and motivation living in the early Christians, the gospel was preached "to every creature which is under heaven" (Colossians 1:23). What a powerful witness! The Spirit of Christ animated the whole congregation, for they had found the pearl of great price. Similar efforts put forth today will produce similar results.

The news flash in our time

These scenes will be repeated and with greater power. What the early Christians experienced on the Day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will be richer. The Spirit awaits our claim and response.

"Let Christians put away all dissension and give themselves to God for the saving of the lost. Let them ask in faith for the promised blessing, and it will come. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was 'the former rain,' and glorious was the result. But the latter rain will be more abundant. What is the promise to those living in these last days? 'Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even today

do I declare that I will render double unto thee.' 'Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field' (Zechariah 9:12; 10:1).

"Christ declared that the divine influence of the Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. But the promise is not appreciated as it should be; and therefore its fulfillment is not seen as it might be. The promise of the Spirit is a matter little thought of; and the result is only what might be expected—spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Minor matters occupy the attention, and the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in its infinite plenitude."⁷

"Do not say, I will praise the Lord when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us. How will you know when the Holy Spirit is poured out, unless you walk in the light day by day? You are to go about your duties, advancing step, by step, according to the counsel of the Lord, and you will find that you will have light and peace and joy, and will make melody in your heart unto the Lord. Thus the people of God will mingle their praises with those of the hosts of heaven, and sing songs of thanksgiving with the angels of God."⁸

"Love is not simply an impulse, a transitory emotion, dependent upon circumstances; it is a living principle, a permanent power. The soul is fed by the streams of pure love that flow from the heart of Christ, as a well-spring that never fails. O, how is the heart quickened, how are its motives ennobled, its affections deepened, by this communion! Under the education and discipline of the Holy Spirit, the children of God love one another, truly, sincerely, unaffectedly—'without partiality, and without hypocrisy' (James 3:17). And this because the heart is in love with Jesus. Our affection for one another springs from our common relation to God. We are one family, we love one another as He loved us."⁹

"God's people have a mighty work before them, a work that must

"The children of God are to love one another sincerely, unaffectedly—'without partiality and without hypocrisy.'"

continually rise to greater prominence. Our efforts in missionary lines must become far more extensive. A more decided work than has been done must be done prior to the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's people are not to cease their labors until they shall encircle the world."¹⁰

The power of the Spirit in the last days will exceed that experienced of the early church.¹¹

The prophecy of Joel 2 "received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel."¹²

Without this experience, the church will not be prepared to warn the world and will not be ready for Christ's return. Without the breath of God, we are mere frozen children of circumstance.

Conclusion

"The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his petition to God. Companies . . . should gather to ask for special help."¹³

"There are many who long to help others, but they feel that they have no spiritual strength or light to impart. Let them present their petitions at the throne of grace. Plead for the Holy Spirit. God stands back of every promise He has made. With your Bible in your hands say, I have done as Thou

hast said. I present Thy promise, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (Matthew 7:7) . . .

"When with earnestness and intensity we breathe a prayer in the name of Christ, there is in that very intensity a pledge from God that He is about to answer our prayer 'exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20)."¹⁴ ✠

References

- ¹ *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23, 24.
- ² *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 48.
- ³ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.
- ⁴ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 6, p. 1117.
- ⁵ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 805.
- ⁶ *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 20, 21.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ⁸ *The Review and Herald*, October 11, 1892.
- ⁹ *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 101.
- ¹⁰ *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 23, 24.
- ¹¹ See *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 121; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.
- ¹² *The Faith I Live By*, p. 292.
- ¹³ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 50.
- ¹⁴ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 147.

Finding Our First Love



By B. Monteiro

In these Week of Prayer readings, we have considered much about the pure, zealous love that is to characterize God's church—and the wonderful results that come when we cultivate this love.

To summarize, let us review again the experience of the early Christians. What did Jesus say about them? In Revelation 2:2, 3, He had words of commendation for their good qualities of character and their determination to uphold the standard of truth. Yet He followed by saying, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Verse 4). He then appealed to them to repent and return to the first works that had formerly occupied their mind and energy. If they refused to do this, He would remove their candlestick (the responsibility of being the source of spiritual light to the world) and, by

their default, entrust this privilege to others. He also made it clear that He was not addressing open sinners. He was appealing to people that were firm in the truth, cherishing sound doctrine, and steadfastly resisting evil. Christ commended them for their hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans (who abandoned God's law), and He closed with a promise of eternal blessing to those who would overcome. (Verses 5–7.)

What had happened to the pure body of Christ?

"Coldness crept into the church. Differences unworthy of notice sprang up, and the eyes of the believers were taken from beholding Jesus as the author and finisher of their faith. Their love for one another began to wane. The multitudes that might have been convicted and converted by a faithful practice of the truth were left unwarned."¹

Why?

"The early Christians began to look for defects in one another. Dwelling upon mistakes, encouraging suspicion and doubt, giving way to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and of the great love He had revealed for sinners. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory of the faith, more severe in their criticisms. In their zeal to condemn others, they themselves erred. They forgot the lesson of brotherly love that Christ had taught. And, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives, and that soon they would walk in darkness, having shut the love of God out of their hearts."²

What were the cause and symptoms of this disease?

Did you notice what had caused this loss of first love? There was a lack of missionary zeal. Why? What had swallowed up the believers' best energies? Rather than looking to Christ and taking the message to souls in darkness, they had focused instead on nitpicking at one another.

Is this also a snare in our day—and how can we know if we are falling prey to it? Let us quote the servant of the Lord:

"God bids me to say to this people, **You have left your first love. You have left many fields unworked**, and yet you appear to feel perfectly at ease."³

Let us wake up now and face reality. Just think: if fields are left unworked, if countries are unwarned, if states, provinces, counties, cities, towns, villages, and neighborhoods are still in darkness, that should raise a warning flag in our mind. We must not rest content with such a condition of things! What have we been doing? What has caused us to be so distracted from the task at hand? Has it been the cares of this life—the constant struggle just to survive in today's society? Or deep down, in some cases, might that preoccupation with managing the day-to-day grind have also been triggered by inner bitterness against others—including even some believers who may have disappointed

"In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

us? Jesus says there is actually a connection—we may not like to admit it, but the first love experience is lost by looking at the shortcomings of humans rather than to the virtues of Christ.

"It is not the opposition of the world that will endanger us the most; the evil cherished in the hearts of professed Christians works out most grievous disaster and retards most the progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening ourselves in spiritual things than by being envious, suspicious of one another, full of faultfinding and evil surmising. [James 3:15–18 quoted.]"⁴

What can we do about this problem?

In order to get back on track, there are some definite steps to take. By retracing our steps, we will see that first love is regained by:

1. Looking to Christ rather than to people.
2. Deeply appreciating God's forgiving love toward me, a sinner.
3. Accepting that love and forgiving those who have wronged me.
4. Radiating that love toward others.

Yes, this abundant love radiates by giving others—including those seemingly hopeless cases—what we might call "the benefit of the doubt." We ought to treat people as if they are innocent, unless they are actually proven guilty of open sin. That means: no evil surmising about people's motives, no wasted moments in petty criticism. It means to envision even those sons of Jacob who sold their brother Joseph into slavery as people who someday will develop into converted patriarchs of present truth. It means having confidence not in what people can do, but in **what Christ can do** in and through them as they surrender to Him, and we pray for them. The focus of us all is to reflect the image of Jesus fully and to lovingly uplift one another in prayer and in the standards

of truth, laboring together in the work of soulsaving.

Just picture the wonderful scene:

"On the day of Pentecost, Christ's witnesses proclaimed the truth, telling men the wonderful news of salvation through Christ. . . . **Every Christian saw in his brother the divine similitude of benevolence and love.** . . . The Spirit of Christ animated the whole congregation; for they had found the pearl of great price."⁵

When every Christian "saw in his brother the divine similitude of benevolence and love," does it mean they all were utterly flawless in character? At that time in history, not necessarily—they did not yet have the fullness of noonday light (Proverbs 4:18) that has shone on our generation. What was it, then, that gave them such a kind, favorable impression of one another?

There is an old saying, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." In whatever direction we choose to look, we tend to see whatever we are specifically looking for. So, if we are not so quick to dwell on things to criticize, we can indeed be among those who "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). "And above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins" (Proverbs 10:12). "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

Is my love really consistent?

During this Week of Prayer, we have read much about the need to exercise love toward Christ and toward others, both in the household of faith and in the world at large. We may have a sincere desire to follow our Lord in this regard and might even think we are doing fairly well at accomplishing this goal. However, it is also important to keep in mind that "the heart is deceit-

The Holy Spirit's voice may not be heard so readily tomorrow. The time for reconciliation is here and now.

ful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Deceitful? Whose heart? Surely someone else's? No, it is referring to every single human heart. Mine. Yours. Some real, personal heart-searching is necessary when it comes to finding whether or not genuine Christlike love truly reigns within.

Some thoughts to consider seriously

Let us pause to ponder for a moment: Do we sometimes rejoice over the spiritual progress of a favorite friend or an interested new soul, yet virtually despise someone else closer to home—perhaps even a fellow believer? This is not right to do. Instead of harboring such partiality, the true "first love" experience is to be broad and generous—it does not harbor favoritism; it is not swayed by old grudges, disappointments, prejudice, or rivalry. Are we careful enough to be aware of whether or not we are actually being consistent in how we think of others?

"Do not cut any man's hands. I once read of a drowning man who was making desperate efforts to get into a boat close beside him. But the boat was full, and as he grasped the side, those in the boat cut off one of his hands. Then he grasped the boat with the other hand, and that hand was cut off. Then he grasped it with his teeth, and those inside had mercy on him, and lifted him in. But how much better it would have been if they had taken him in before they had cut off his hands!

"My brethren, do not cut a man to pieces before you do anything to help him. God wants us to have hearts of pity. He wants us to have reason and judgment and the sanctification of His Spirit. He is in earnest with us. We are but His little children, and we should ever be learning of Him. Do not stand in the way of others. Do not lose your first love. You may have much knowl-

edge and much intelligence, but if the love of God is lacking, you are not prepared to enter heaven."⁶

Surely you or I would never be like those people in the boat, would we? Perhaps not literally. But in the process of supposedly thinking to help people develop perfection of character, do we sometimes look at them with such highly critical eyes that they feel belittled by hopelessness and shame? Is that really God's method by which to restore them to His image? It is not!

Sometimes it seems as if an imperfect person can never do anything right. Whatever he or she does, in whatever way it is done, it always seems to be the wrong thing done or the wrong way of doing it. Have you ever harbored this kind of attitude against someone? You might be surprised—don't trust your own answer to this question—go to God in secret and ask Him! Then, if the Holy Spirit impresses you that this is the case, what do you plan to do about it? Would it not be appropriate to pray for and with that defective person you may not like—and to apologize to him or her about the unkind attitude you have been manifesting? Contempt or disdain for someone is not something easily disguised. It is usually obvious, so he or she probably is aware of the way you feel and has quite likely been hurt by it—perhaps more than you realize. It would also be right to apologize to onlookers whose minds may likely have already been poisoned by the damage done by your treatment of this person.

Have we sometimes dropped a casual word here or there that has blemished the reputation of a fellow believer—especially when we knew we had a sympathetic audience that would readily latch onto our negative attitude and likely agree with us? This is what a pack of dogs will do against a weak or sickly animal, even a member of their own pack. Dogs have a way

of sometimes triggering a suddenly hostile, mob-like spirit in one another that can be totally irrational. But such behavior is not befitting to Christians! Only God knows how many souls have been drawn *to* the truth because of its beauty, only to be driven *away from* organized religion because of harsh attitudes—attitudes that spread like wildfire when it is easier to join in on picking on a person than to defend him or her against unkind, unjust, or exaggerated criticism.

Do not delay to fix this matter! If it exists in your midst, do not let this Week of Prayer slip past without taking care of the problem—if appropriate, perhaps even before going home from this meeting! The wooing of the Holy Spirit's voice to your heart may not be heard so readily tomorrow. The time for reconciliation is here and now.

What if someone has hurt me?

"We should take our fitting place in humble penitence at the foot of the cross. We may learn the lessons of meekness and lowliness of mind as we go up to Mount Calvary, and, looking upon the cross, see our Saviour in agony, the Son of God dying, the just for the unjust. Behold Him who could summon legions of angels to His assistance with one word, a subject of jest and merriment, of reviling and hatred. He gives Himself a sacrifice for sin. When reviled, He threatened not; when falsely accused, He opened not His mouth. He prays on the cross for His murderers. He is dying for them. He is paying an infinite price for every one of them. He would not lose one whom He has purchased at so great cost. He gives Himself to be smitten, and scourged, without a murmur. And this uncomplaining victim is the Son of God. His throne is from everlasting, and His kingdom shall have no end. . . .

"Look, O look upon the cross of Calvary; behold the royal Victim suffering on your account, and be wise while you have opportunity, and seek now the fountain of life and true happiness. Come, you who complain and murmur at the little inconveniences and the few trials you must bear in this life. Look on Jesus, the author and finisher of your

faith. He turns from His royal throne, His high command, and lays aside His royal robe, and clothes His divinity with humanity. For our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich.

"The Son of God was rejected and despised for our sakes. Can you, in full view of the cross, beholding by the eye of faith the sufferings of Christ, tell your tale of woe, your trials? Can you nurse revenge of your enemies in your heart while the prayer of Christ comes from His pale and quivering lips for His revilers, His murderers—'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34)?

"A work is before us to subdue pride and vanity, that seek a place in our hearts, and through penitence and faith to bring ourselves into familiar and holy converse with Jesus Christ. We must not shrink from the depths of humiliation to which the Son of God submitted in order to raise us from the degradation and bondage of sin to a seat at his right hand. We must deny self and fight continually against pride. We must hide self in Jesus Christ, and let Him appear in our conversation and character as the One altogether lovely, and the chief among ten thousand. Our lives, our deportment, will testify how highly we prize Christ, and the salvation He has wrought out for us at such a cost to Himself. While we look constantly to Him whom our sins have pierced and our sorrows have burdened, we shall acquire strength to be like Him."⁷

What should I do with gossip?

"If a word is dropped that is detrimental to the character of a friend or brother, never encourage this evil-speaking; for it is the work of the enemy. Remind the speaker that God's Word forbids this kind of conversation. We are to empty the heart of everything that defiles the soul temple, that Christ may dwell within. The Redeemer has told us how we may reveal Him to the world. If we cherish His Spirit, if we manifest His love toward others, if we **guard one another's interests**, if we are kind, patient, forbearing, the fruits we bear will give evidence to the world that we are

"Let no differences or dissensions exist in the church. Let all go to work to help someone who needs help."

God's children. It is unity in the church that enables Christians to exert a strong influence upon unbelievers. . . .

"Every heart has its own sorrows and disappointments, and we should seek to lighten one another's burdens by manifesting the love of Jesus to those around us. If our conversation were upon heaven and heavenly things, evil-speaking would soon cease to have any attraction for us. . . .

"Instead of finding fault with others, let us be critical with ourselves. Everyone should inquire, Is my heart right before God? Am I glorifying my heavenly Father? If you have cherished a wrong spirit, banish it from the soul. Eradicate from your heart everything that is of a defiling nature. **Pluck up every root of bitterness**, lest others be contaminated by the baleful influence. Do not allow one poisonous plant to remain in the soil of your heart. Root it out this very hour and cultivate in its stead the plant of love. Let Jesus be enshrined in the soul temple."⁸

"Let no differences or dissensions exist in the church. Let all go to work to help someone who needs help. There is a cause for the great weakness in our churches, and that cause is hard to remove. It is self. Men have none too much will, but they must have it wholly sanctified to God. They need to fall on the Rock and be broken."⁹

What next?

"The first works of the church were seen when the believers sought out friends, relatives, and acquaintances, and with hearts overflowing with love told the story of what Jesus was to them and what they were to Jesus. . . .

"There can be no scolding or fretting, no arbitrary authority exercised, no putting forth of the finger and speaking vanity; but come to the work with hearts warmed with love for Jesus and for precious souls for whom He died."¹⁰

A glorious scene

"After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a risen Saviour, their one desire was the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth's sake."¹¹

"God wants every soul to return to the first love. He wants all to have the gold of faith and love, so that they can draw from the treasure to impart to others who need it.

"Then the believers will be of one heart and of one mind, and the Lord will make His word powerful in the earth. New cities and villages and territories will be entered; the church will arise and shine, because her light has come, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon her. New converts will be added to the churches, and those who now claim to be converted will feel in their own hearts the transforming power of the grace of Christ."¹²

Fellow believers, why not eagerly take hold of this tremendous opportunity to be part of the action! Christ has done the bidding; He supplies the power—all He asks is our willing cooperation—all a very humble attitude toward one another! *✠*

References

¹ *The Review and Herald*, May 26, 1903. [Emphasis supplied.]

² *Ibid.*, February 25, 1904. [Emphasis supplied.]

³ *The General Conference Bulletin*, April 7, 1903. [Emphasis supplied.]

⁴ *The Review and Herald*, February 25, 1904.

⁵ *The Signs of the Times*, December 1, 1898. [Emphasis supplied.]

⁶ *The General Conference Bulletin*, April 7, 1903.

⁷ *The Review and Herald*, August 2, 1881.

⁸ *Ibid.*, February 25, 1904.

⁹ *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 168, 169.

¹¹ *The Review and Herald*, February 25, 1904.

¹² *Ibid.*, December 23, 1890.

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Regaining That First Love

Have you left it—is it gone?
Has it fallen now to rust?
Has your love for souls been trailing in the dust?

Do you need it to be saved—
Is it part of Christian trust?
Yes, essential! Find it now, indeed you must!

Where it went, you wonder now—
To good works it did provoke
All that tender, early love for many folk!

Yet it's gone; you wonder why—
As if shattered by a stroke. . . .
It is almost like it drifted up in smoke!

Grayish fog befell the camp;
O'er the flame did someone smother
All that special, vibrant care for one another!

So, let's turn away that focus
At our foe, friend, family, mother—
To the place where pleads our precious Elder Brother!

Before His throne, let us bow down.
Before His cross we now should weep,
Regaining first that sacred love we ought to keep—

To overcome the roaring lion:
In kindness tread the pathway steep
Outside the fold—it's time to win those poor, lost sheep!

—B. Monteiro