

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Book of Acts
Lesson 12: Confinement at Caesarea

Living happily ever after is for fairy tales, not for apostles or anyone who believes or teaches the genuine gospel. Historians tell us that Paul died in his early to mid-sixties. With all the physical abuse he endured throughout his life from enemies of the gospel, he was probably suffering the long-term effects of that plus the usual physical and mental problems of aging. Why didn't he gracefully acknowledge the inevitable and turn the ministry over to the younger men who were being groomed to fill his shoes?

Those who have experienced the joy of the 1888 message see many who have no hope because they have been taught a different idea of the gospel. Like Paul, we are "compelled" to tell what God has done for us and the whole world. Right now, many serious-minded people in the Seventh-day Adventist Church have a great burden for our churches, especially for the youth. It's a helpless feeling when we see so many leaving. We hope and pray that somehow the Lord will find a way to bring them back. We fear that people who have never heard the genuine gospel based on what Christ has already done for them (see Romans 5), may never return to a church that doesn't preach that gospel clearly.

On Sunday our Sabbath School lesson (page 97) refers to Acts 24:16 where "Paul said that he strove always to have a 'conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.'" Two questions are asked: "What does that mean?" and "What, if anything, would you have to change in order to say the same thing?" Such questions can plunge people into genuine despair if they think *they* have to do whatever it takes to have a conscience "void of offence." The more we think this, the more we struggle to please God. We look within ourselves and are tempted to give up trying something that is impossible. What we need to do is give up what we think is our right to fight the devil.

"There can be no growth or fruitfulness in the life that is centered in self. If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ, —the spirit of unselfish love and labor for others, —you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.
[1]

Too many people work at resisting sin and the devil in order to have the "conscience void of offense." Over and over they beg God to give them the strength to resist until

they finally give up. By God's grace, they fall at the foot of the cross and give up the battle to resist, and concentrate on the battle to *believe* what God, in the life of Jesus, has already done for you. This is a daily matter. We can never forget we are sinners, and daily need the grace of God. "And He [said] to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23, *New American Standard Bible*).

"The reason for Jesus' command to take up our cross *daily* is the fact that the 'old man' [see Romans 7] who was crucified yesterday reappears in a new form today. His true identity is never fully apprehended by the sincere believer.

"What we sense as 'self' today may be correct, and our experience of renouncing and crucifying self today may be genuine. But each succeeding victory is that of a battle and not the war itself. The 'old man' reappears in a higher, more cleverly disguised form daily. Hence the need, as Jesus says, for bearing the cross daily. ...

"Not only will the cross be carried here in this life daily, but even in heaven's eternity the principle of self-renunciation symbolized by the cross will motivate the behavior of the redeemed, while the cross of Christ will remain their study. The book of Revelation presents to us that after sin is no more, Christ will still bear His title as the Crucified One—the 'Lamb.' ...The love so amply demonstrated on the cross will ever be recognized as the basis of God's government, and will flow out to all the universe in unending streams of light and life and gladness.

"Only as the selfless love of Christ on the cross reigns in every heart will it be certain that sin can never appear again. Should the love of self ever arise in any heart in the universe, the very essence of sin would be back again, and the whole sad war in the universe would have to be repeated. Thank God, that will not happen! 'Affliction will not rise up a second time' (Nahum 1:9). And in bearing our cross daily now, we are beginning to live out that principle of eternal life." [2]

It is only by dying daily, to that "old man" self that we can examine our consciences and say they are without offense to God. We may be helpless to "fix" ourselves and our conscience, but Christ is not helpless and He has been given all power to bring us into right standing. Our job is to believe He will do that for us.

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly according as God had dealt to every man the measure of faith.' Rom. 12:3. This text indicates that the greater a man's faith is, the less will he think of himself. As the apostle expresses it, he will 'think soberly.' Pride is intoxication. Just as alcohol stimulates a man without building him up, ... so a man, to use a common expression, 'loses his head' when he gets to hunting for the good traits in his character. ...

"Great diseases call for great remedies; the weaker a man is, the more aid will have to be given him. So the more the man feels his sinful condition, the more faith in Christ will

he exercise. Therefore it is true that great faith on the part of any person is an evidence that that person feels that he is by nature very weak and sinful, and that without Christ he is nothing. ... It is only when Christians lose their sense of unworthiness, and begin to look upon themselves with complacency, that they lose faith.” [3]

Paul was a great apostle in the work of spreading the gospel, but he never placed confidence in the flesh. “If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ” (Phil. 3:4-7, NASB).

May we join Paul in thinking of ourselves soberly which will result in a clear conscience while we continue spreading the Good News.

—Arlene Hill

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 67, 68.

[2] Robert J. Wieland, *In Search of the Cross*, pp. 51, 52; Glad Tidings ed., 1999.

[3] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 175-177; Glad Tidings ed., 1999.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/7qwrcBL6wBg>

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