

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Book of Revelation
Lesson 13: “I Make All Things New”

What is the mind of Christ today toward the organized denomination known as Seventh-day Adventists?

The last book of the Bible is the “revelation of Jesus Christ.” There we can trace His “mind” toward His church and its destiny from the time of the apostles down to the end of the world. In chapter 12 He pictures the church as “a woman” opposed by Satan through all the ages of the Christian era. Finally she emerges in the last act of the drama as “the remnant of her seed” (*King James Version*) which “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). She is to become the bride of Christ because the time must come when “the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7).

The outstanding demonstration of two thousand years of history is the public display of a church that is as completely loyal to Christ as a faithful bride is loyal to her husband. Seventh-day Adventists have always seen their destiny pictured in these end-time symbols.

Since the true Head of this church is Christ Himself, His honor and vindication are involved in the victory of this “woman” over her archenemy. He knows a way to bring healing and unity to His “body.”

Ellen White identifies the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church as this “remnant”: “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. ... the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. ... The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world.” [1]

“Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port.” [2]

“The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place.” [3]

“I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time.” [4]

Some of these and other similar statements were made decades after the 1888 experience, indicating that Ellen White still regarded the organized church as the body of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it was. But it must experience repentance and spiritual reformation. As Christ called Abraham's family to witness to His truth in a world of paganism, so He has called Seventh-day Adventists to call the apostate Christian churches and the entire world, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and paganism, to repentance.

The fundamental issue to be settled is its true identity: if it is a fallible hierarchy of men and women, there is no hope for its future, and there is likewise no hope for any offshoot from it to succeed any better; but if we have a firm faith that the Lord Jesus is the true Leader of this church, then we can have confidence that He will cleanse and purify it as He has promised to do. If it was the Lord Jesus who initiated this church's calling, we can be sure that He knows how to finalize it.

There are several grand truths about Christ's second coming that we need to consider: His character has not changed from what it was 2000 years ago. "This same Jesus ... will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). But Paul says that "in flaming fire" He will "take vengeance" on His enemies (2 Thess. 1:8). Will He be a bloodthirsty tyrant with a laser gun to mow down His enemies in hateful revenge? If "God is love" (1 John 4:8), Christ must still be love when He returns. James and John wanted to call down that same "fire ... from heaven" to wipe out the unbelieving Samaritans, but Jesus said, No, "the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:54, 56). Why the apparent change at the second coming?

The reason is that God's personal presence is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Have you ever put a dish with a plastic spoon in the microwave? No problem. But if you leave in a metal spoon, the microwaves attack it. The personal presence of God is not destruction to His people who have overcome sin, for He loves them; but it has to be destruction to sin itself. Those who have made a final choice to cling to it are like the spoon in the microwave—the personal presence of *agape* has to destroy them because they have clung to sin like a vine to a tree until both are one. They simply cannot endure to look into the face of Christ. The point is doesn't it make sense to get rid of the sin now?

But someone may say, "Yes, I'd like to, but it is too deep within me. I don't see how I can ever overcome it." That problem is the reason why Jesus Christ is now serving as great High Priest in His final work in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16; 7:25; Titus 2:11). Heaven's total resources are ours for overcoming sin in this Day of Atonement. Sin can be removed from the heart, from the character, no matter how deeply we have sinned against the Lord. A mere forgiveness that excuses or pardons it but leaves it intact is not good enough. When the Lord truly forgives a sin, He takes it away. Clearly this is an 1888 idea. Writes E. J. Waggoner, "The cleansing of the sanctuary is the blotting out of the sins of God's people." [5] The essence of Adventism insists that there is a difference between the forgiveness of sin and the blotting out of sin, and the good news is that He will blot it out if we let Him do so.

Therefore the only reason why the second coming has been delayed is because God's people are not ready to face His personal presence. Sin in the heart would result in their destruction. The Lord loves them too much to subject them to such a test unless they are ready. Thus Peter says that Christ delays, "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus Christ is a disappointed Bridegroom. Rightly understood, the entire Bible becomes a love story, with the climax near the end in Revelation 19. A wedding takes place because at last the bride "has made herself ready" (vs. 7). Christ has long desired that day to come, because His love for His church is likened to that of a bridegroom for his bride (Eph. 5:22-32). He placed the Song of Solomon in the Bible for a purpose—to arouse our hearts to sense the full meaning of His love for His church. The second coming will be to take His bride to Himself.

The Father therefore has not predetermined the time for Christ's second coming. In His infinite foreknowledge He knows the time, but for Him to know is not the same as to predetermine. For example, He knows who will eventually be saved and who will be lost, but He does not predetermine salvation or damnation for anyone. And Jesus expressly says He does not know the time of His coming (Mark 13:32).

The timing of the second coming is a different matter than for the first. To confuse the two is to repeat the mistake of the ancient Jews who assumed that the prophecies of the two advents were the same. Daniel indeed foretold exactly when Christ should appear as Messiah, and "like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay." [6] But the love of God requires that the timing for the second coming must be dependent on a people getting ready.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 19.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book two, p. 390.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 380.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 397.

[5] E. J. Waggoner, "Cleansing of the Sanctuary," *Signs of the Times*, May 13, 1886, p. 279.10.

[6] See Daniel 9:24-27; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/Npu9666gH3w>

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org