

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

Lesson 4. Escape From the World's Ways

A steward is a manager, or keeper, of someone else's goods and property. In the Bible we first read of stewardship in Genesis 2:15 which states that Adam was made a "keeper" of God's earth and all that was in it. But because Adam believed Satan's lie about God's character, he lost his dominion and "delivered" his Master's "goods" to the enemy (see Luke 4:6; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

In Genesis 15:2, Abraham refers to Eliezer of Damascus as his steward. Joseph was made steward of Potiphar's household, and later steward over all of Pharaoh's domain. These are examples of wise and faithful managers of their earthly master's property. The Bible also tells us of unfaithful stewards, servants who say in their hearts, "my Lord delays His coming." They focus on their apparent spiritual wealth, knowledge, and position and fall into the world's ways, neglecting the work God set before them. They become Laodicean, not comprehending that they "are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

Beginning in 1844, God called a people out of the world so He could bring them to spiritual maturity beyond "Reformation theology" and the limited understanding of justification proclaimed by reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), and John Wesley (1703-1791). For nearly two millennia Satan worked to obscure the true foundation of justification, which is the faith of Christ. Many of the Pharisees, papists, and some Reformers taught that commandment-keeping ("works of the law" or sacraments of the church) was the *way* to justification, thus obscuring the truth that commandment-keeping by faith is the *result* of justification in all who will believe in the power of God to deliver from sin.

As a "called out remnant" the Second Advent people, who eventually formed into the Seventh-day Adventist movement, learned the vital importance of following their Saviour in His work as humanity's high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. They were called of God to proclaim "great truths that have lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost"—vital truths that the Reformers and Evangelicals never had. These truths "are to shine from God's word in their native purity" through the "1888 message" of Christ and His righteousness. [1]

However, by the mid-1880s, Satan had caused much theological confusion. He well knows that when Christ's "most precious message" is fully accepted into the heart and proclaimed to the world, it will culminate in the finishing of Christ's day of atonement ministry. A. T. Jones commented on the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary when he wrote: "... we are plainly taught that the service of our great High Priest in the cleansing

of the true sanctuary must be preceded by the cleansing of each one of the believers, the cleansing of each one who has a part in that service of the true High Priest in the true sanctuary. It is plain that transgression must be finished, and end of sins and reconciliation for all iniquity must be made, and everlasting righteousness must be brought in, in the heart's experience of every believer in Jesus, before the cleansing of the true sanctuary can be accomplished." [2]

Instead of preachers of righteousness by faith, as a people we became expert expositors and defenders of the Law of God, so much so that by the mid-1880s "we [had] been at work on the law until we [were] as dry as the hills of Gilboa, without dew or rain." [3] We reckoned it more important to rely on the law and our own ability to keep it, than to depend exclusively upon the Author of that Law, and thus we became confused stewards of God's final message to a dying world. As a result we have delayed the second coming of our Lord. We must not blame God for the delay that is due to our own insubordination. [4]

During that time of spiritual confusion, God raised up two young men, A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, to bring a special message to His remnant people. "The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders [E. J.] Waggoner and [A. T.] Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. ... This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure." [5]

We have remained in this world more than a century since this counsel was given, forcing us to ponder: Are we faithful servants of the message that God Himself commanded was to be given to the world; or are we unfaithful stewards, hiding the truth under a bushel; or worse, are we actively fighting against the proclamation of the message by distorting truth and history?

At the 1893 General Conference Session, Elder Jones quoted from a testimony from Mrs. White entitled, "The Crisis Imminent." "Something great and decisive is to take place, and that right early. If any delay, the character of God and His throne will be compromised." Then Elder Jones cautioned: "Brethren, by our careless, indifferent attitude, we are putting God's throne into jeopardy. ... Brethren, for the Lord's sake, and for His throne's sake, let us get out of the way. Let us get out of the way. The only way to get out of the way of God is to flee to Him." [6]

Getting "out of God's way" is in reality falling into His outstretched loving arms where He enrobes us in the personal intimacy of His own righteousness. Only when we allow ourselves to be wrapped in His arms can we have a "personal relationship" with Jesus. Nestled in intimate fellowship, when we pray we are but whispering into the ear of our loving Saviour and, answering, He imparts the power of His Spirit to us. "Faith in Jesus

Christ, personal faith in Jesus Christ, and receiving righteousness by faith, and the keeping of the Sabbath, seeing Christ in it, and receiving the seal of God, the perfect image of Jesus Christ, reflected in the character,—this prepares the character for the close of probation.” [7]

“We receive the promise of the Spirit through faith; but what *brings* it? The Spirit of God; and when we have that, Christ dwells in the heart. Then it is the Holy Spirit that brings the personal presence of Jesus Christ; and in bringing His personal presence to us, He brings Himself. Then it is the mind of Christ, by which we may comprehend, investigate, and revel in, the deep things of God which He reaches down and brings forth to our understanding and sets them before us in their plainness. That is what we must have, in order to have the presence of Christ, in order to have the righteousness of Christ, in order that we may have the latter rain, in order that we may give the loud cry.” [8]

“Getting out of God’s way” also means that we cease damming-up the work through our resistance, and become willing to unashamedly declare to the world that the message we received during the “1888” era is indeed unique. It is deeper than anything the Protestant Reformers or Pharisaical legalists knew, and more sublime than Evangelical theology, reaching to the very heights of the throne of God. Why is it important to focus on the uniqueness of the message?—because, unlike Reformation theology, the message of Christ and His righteousness reclaims from sin through the perfection of our characters, and proclaims everlasting righteousness in Christ.

The balanced understanding of justification by faith brought to us through Elders Jones and Waggoner, has significantly more depth than any previous exposition of the Gospel. “When Brother Waggoner brought out these ideas in Minneapolis, it was the first clear teaching on this subject from any human lips I had heard, excepting the conversations between myself and my husband. I have said to myself, it is because God has presented it to me in vision that I see it so clearly, and they cannot see it because they have never had it presented to them as I have. And when another presented it, every fiber of my heart said, Amen.” [9]

Appreciation of God’s “1888 message” motivates us to careful stewardship in every aspect of our lives. It spiritually elevates us from the world and its alluring attractions, separates us from all unrighteousness, and exalts Christ and His righteousness as the only way of salvation. Justification, both the legal aspect and the application of that justification when “worked out” by the Holy Spirit in our personal lives (see Phil. 2:12, 13), will inspire others to embrace the truth of God’s plan of salvation. Plumbing the depth of the “1888 message,” we escape from the world’s ways and find spiritual comfort and peace in a world that has gone awry.

—Ann Walper

Endnotes:

[1] See Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 473.

[2] A. T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, p. 121 (2003 ed.).

[3] Ellen G. White, *1888 Materials*, p. 557; see also p. 560, *Advent Review and Sabbath*

Herald, March 11, 1890.

[4] See Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 696.

[5] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 91, 92.

[6] A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message—No. 3," *1893 General Conference Bulletin*, p. 73.

[7] A. T. Jones, "Health Reform by Faith," *The Home Missionary*, Nov. 1893.

[8] A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message—No. 11," *1893 General Conference Bulletin*, p. 246.

[9] Ellen G. White, MS 5, Sermon, "Christ and the Law," Rome, New York, June 19, 1889.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/rkl0ou0Hk4c>

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