

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart **Lesson 5. Stewards After Eden**

We should begin asking the right questions at the right time. And the right time is this time of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, while our great High Priest is completing His work of final atonement. Christ is to accomplish a work unique in human history, since sin began. While no child of God will ever claim to have overcome all sin, and while it is equally true that we cannot judge any present or past individual (except Christ) that he has overcome as He overcame, that does not mean that the ministry of Christ in the Most Holy Apartment will fail to achieve such results. However much in the past or in the present we have failed to overcome, for us to say that it is impossible to overcome sin through faith in the Redeemer is actually to justify and to encourage sin, and to stand on the great enemy's side.

Our lesson says, "We are stewards of things that we do not understand fully. ... Our greatest stewardship is to live 'as servants of Christ and stewards of the *mysteries of God*' (1 Cor. 4:1, NKJV)." [1] Well, it's about time we grow up and "do ... understand fully" our stewardship "of the mysteries of God."

The right questions to ask are: Is the sacrifice of Christ as Lamb of God, and is His ministry as great High Priest, powerful enough to save His people from (not in) their sins? Is He truly able to save to the uttermost [completely] those who come unto God by Him? Will He be truly successful "as a refiner and purifier of silver ... [to] purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:3)?

If the Lord wants to, He can create "a new thing in the earth," says Jeremiah (31:22); and what He wants to accomplish is the preparation of a people for the second coming of Christ. When Christ comes the second time, will He find a people of whom it can honestly be said, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12)? For the first time in human history, this divine announcement is made. Such are "the mysteries of God."

To say that these saints don't really keep the commandments, but God pretends that they do, is to violate the context of the three angels' messages. Heaven declares these people to be "virgins. ... They ... follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. ... In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:4, 5). We know they are sinful by nature, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But in order for this pronouncement to make any sense, the faith of Jesus has worked, and they must have ceased to continue sinning. *They have overcome even as Christ overcame* (Rev. 3:21). To try to insert this prophetic glimpse of

an overcoming people into the post-Second Advent future is to violate the context completely. It is clear from Revelation 15:2 that this same group have gotten the victory before the close of human probation.

Previous generations have never been able to understand clearly the truth of Christian perfection without falling into the errors of perfectionism, for the reason that the hour for the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary had not yet struck. However, when we come to the “days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the *mystery of God* should be *finished*, as He hath declared to his servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7).

Here is the special contribution that Seventh-day Adventists are to make to the completion of the great Reformation and the fulfillment of the gospel commission. There must be a joining together of the truth of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the truth of justification by faith. And it is here that we begin to sense the real significance of the 1888 message as the Lord sent it to His people.

The 1888 message was one of glorious hope, free both from fanaticism and the errors of perfectionism. Both “messengers” (A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner), from the beginning of the 1888 era, were clear and emphatic that sinless living is possible, “the mystery of God,” that God’s people can overcome even as Christ overcame, and that the key to this glorious possibility lies in His people’s faith in the ministry of the High Priest in the Most Holy Apartment.

The first three sentences of Waggoner’s *Christ and His Righteousness* neatly summarize their concept of sinless living. They are the acorn of a truth that grew into a mighty oak: “In the first verse of the third chapter of Hebrews we have an exhortation which comprehends all the injunctions given to the Christian. It is this: ‘Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.’ To do this as the Bible enjoins, to consider Christ continually and intelligently, just as He is, will transform one into a perfect Christian, for ‘by beholding we become changed.’” [2]

Built securely on Luther’s concept of justification by faith, Jones and Waggoner together set forth three essential elements of the uniqueness of the three angels’ messages. Here is where the 1888 message goes further than the sixteenth-century Reformers were able to go in their day:

First, the believer is called to “consider the ... High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” in His work of cleansing the sanctuary in the antitypical Day of Atonement which began in 1844.

Second, to consider Christ continually and intelligently, just as He is, is to consider the true New Testament teaching that His role as Substitute and Example required Him to take the nature of fallen man, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and thus be *able* to succor them that are tempted.

Third, faith in such a Saviour and High Priest will transform one into a perfect Christian. Waggoner used the word *transform*. Not only will the true believer be counted or legally reckoned such; he will actually become a perfect Christian by faith.

We are admonished by the Apostle Paul, “Holding the mystery of the faith in a *pure conscience*. ... And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:9, 16). Certainly “a pure conscience” indicates Christian character perfection. Perfect Love is the mystery of godliness. But real Love for Christ is lacking. That’s why of course real godliness in Laodicea is lacking also.

So when Ellen White heard this message she recognized in it the power and force of the gospel which would prepare God’s people to stand with a pure character in the day of Christ’s second coming. They would be a living testimony for God through the crisis hour. They would be part of the 144,000 who would be translated without seeing death at His return. They would be a living testament to the power of God unto salvation from sin. Living in sinful flesh, tempted, tried and afflicted, the mystery of godliness would be revealed in them—”Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 39.

[2] Page 7, Glad Tidings ed., 1999.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/STPwUDgsMlc>

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