

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

The Book of Acts **Lesson 6. The Ministry of Peter**

From the very beginning of the early days of Christianity, there have been conflicts about how good the Good News is. The letter to the Galatians is evidence. The early converts from the Jews had to wrestle against a deep mind-set idea that no one could be saved except Jews, that Gentiles were automatically excluded from the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. Remember how Peter had to overcome that prejudice in Acts 10:28 when he was sent to Cornelius?

Deeply laid prejudices seemed almost ineradicable. The "faithful" Jewish Christians just felt in their bones that the gates of the New Jerusalem had to be shut against Gentiles, that Christ was Messiah and Savior only to themselves, that their work as apostles was to go to all the Jews in the Diaspora scattered around the world. But Paul's mind had been enlightened with a far brighter view of how good the Good News is! "God ... will have all men to be saved," the Messiah is already "the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe," He has "abolished death [the second!] and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," and has become the new or second Adam for the entire human race and has given, not merely offered, the "gift" of salvation to "all men" just as Adam gave "condemnation" to them (see 1 Tim. 2:4, 1 Tim. 4:10, 2 Tim. 1:10, Rom. 5:15, 16).

These "big ideas" (all from Paul) stretched the minds and hearts of the early Jewish Christians, and they still challenge our thinking today. Does the Son of God merely "offer" justification to "all men" with the initiative in their hands, or has He on His own initiative given it freely by grace as a "gift" to "all men"? Does He open the gates of the New Jerusalem to "all men" so that in the end the only ones who are outside are those who themselves refuse by unbelief to enter? Could the Good News be that good?

Many people think that we don't really need to study the gospel because we already understand it. In fact, we have understood the gospel for about 150 years. All we really need is more money so that we can turn up the volume control and amplify our *present* understanding of the gospel so that more people can hear it around the world and then the work will be finished.

But the Lord surprised all of us in 1888 when he sent two young men (A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner) with a "most precious message" about the gospel. Ellen White said it was "new light." Now sometimes she said it was not new light but said it was old light that had been recovered. There were many times in fact when she said, Yes indeed it is new light, it is additional light, it is in fact, "the beginning of the light of the [fourth] angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth." [1] She said that God commanded that this

message should be given to the world. Sad but true, many, in fact most of our dear brethren years ago, reacted against the message that has been kept away from the church and from the world.

Calvinism has failed to penetrate the heart of the gospel when it says that Christ died only to provide justification for the elect. Arminianism also failed to penetrate the heart of the gospel for it says that Christ died only to make a provision whereby it might be possible for all men to be justified only if they do something first. The 1888 message broke through the clouds into the sunlight above and said that Paul and the apostle John and the Lord Jesus himself mean exactly what they said, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Christ has tasted the second death for every man, he has died every man's second death (see Rev. 2:11, 20:14). There is no reason under heaven why any human being should go into the lake of fire except that he has resisted and rejected what Christ has already done for him.

This leads into another beautiful truth that it is easy to be saved and hard to be lost *if* you understand how good the Good News is. God's love is a seeking love. He is not waiting for us to find Him. The good shepherd is out looking for his lost sheep.

So the true answer to the question: What must I do to be saved? is not to study your Bible, witness more, pray more, etc. The true Bible answer to that question is just what the Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). And then people say, No, this can't be true because there is something besides believing that is required. 100 years ago our brethren did not like the message because they thought it degraded works or it did not give works proper attention. That is the fear today. The Bible does not teach that we are saved by faith *and* works. The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by *faith*, but it is a faith which *works*.

And that leads us to the cross of Christ, to understand what faith is. Faith is a heart appreciation of the tremendous dimensions of the *agape* love revealed at the cross. Someone asks a question, "Is it really true that what the world church needs is a revelation of Christ and Him crucified? Shouldn't we be preaching against short skirts, TV, and this and that abomination? Shouldn't this be the burden of our message?" We learned this week that if we believe the Bible, the only answer to the sin problem is the cross where there is much more abounding grace.

We have learned about the two covenants, that we are not saved by making promises to God. We are not saved even by trying to keep our promises to God, but we are saved by believing His promises to us. We learned that Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, came to Israel of old, the early church, when they understood the principle of corporate guilt and corporate repentance. They realized that they were the ones who crucified the Son of God. The Spirit of God fell upon the Gentiles in Cornelius' house when they understood that it wasn't only the Romans and the Jews who crucified Christ but it was they. They partook of that sin even though they were not present at Calvary. The sin of crucifying Christ is the sin of the world.

The apostles are said to have marveled that the Gentiles should experience the same phenomenal response to the cross that the believing Jews did, and thus receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-47). Peter and his followers evidently did not expect this response, because Peter was careful in his sermon in Cornelius's home to tell the Gentiles that it was the Jews who "slew and hanged [Christ] on a tree" (vs. 39). He said nothing about the Gentiles being guilty. The phenomenal reception of the Holy Spirit was due to the believing Jews' phenomenal repentance for the sin of the ages—crucifying the Son of God. How could the "innocent" Gentiles share in this experience?

The Holy Spirit sent His words closer home than Peter expected. *His contrite hearers identified themselves with the Jews and recognized themselves as fully sharing in the guilt.* Only thus could they have shared the depths of repentance which made possible their reception of the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they experienced corporate repentance.

The latter rain will come when we realize our true corporate guilt; that the guilt of others would be our guilt but for the grace of Christ. The guilt of others is our guilt because all of us have the same flesh and sinful nature. All of this beautiful truth imparts a motivation that cures lukewarmness. It is impossible for a world church to be lukewarm if that church understands the gospel.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book one, p. 363.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/QpP48RaKAow>

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