

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

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart **Lesson 7. Honesty With God**

Is there a better word than “stewardship” in describing our relationship to Jesus in His work of proclaiming the gospel “to every creature”? The 1888 message helps us to see the *joy of fellowship* with Jesus in giving and serving the world.

Coming to the fore as the most significant contribution of the 1888 message is: *the motivation for giving and serving Christ*. Why do we keep the Sabbath, pay our tithe, work as missionaries, etc.? Because we want to be saved. We don’t want to be lost; we want to go to heaven. Very good idea, but if it never goes beyond that, it is the root of legalism. All self-centered motivation is “under the law,” old covenant, and it will surely fail in the final crisis. Much of our public evangelism is based on this egocentric appeal, which is good for a childish understanding.

But the Bible speaks often of a process of growing up. Ephesians 4 says we must “henceforth be no more children, ... but speaking the truth in love, may *grow up* into Him in all things.” In fact, we are to come “unto a [*mature* person], unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (vss. 14, 15, 13).

The 1888 message points us to a new self-forgetful motivation: *a concern for Jesus*, that He receive His reward, that He be crowned King of kings (not that we “wear a crown in our Father’s house,” as the ditty goes), that we honor *Him*, that this burden of sorrow He feels for a world reeling in woe may be lifted, that *He* see the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

This new motivation is created in our worldly, self-centered, sinful hearts by the introduction of something the Bible calls *agape* (Rom. 5:8). This also is a fundamental idea of the 1888 message. It is a concept of love far different than human beings normally understand, or that Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in general understand. It is a concept of love consistent with the biblical idea of the non-immortality of the soul.

Those who believe in natural immortality find it impossible to grasp the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of this biblical idea of *agape*. Ellen White makes clear in her own simple language that this concept of *agape* is today ministered solely from the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, it is a refreshingly different yea of the gospel than is possible for people to proclaim who do not understand the nature of man or the ministry of the High Priest in the second apartment since 1844. [1] It involves the proclamation of the Lamb of God and His cross in high-fidelity realism never clearly grasped by Seventh-day Adventists and by the world itself.

The important element of the 1888 message that deserves our careful study is the relationship between the final atonement work of Christ in cleansing the heavenly sanctuary and the biblical truth of justification by faith.

The biblical view of justification by faith is refreshingly different from the all-too-common view. The 1888 message sees justification by faith as *experiential*; that is, *it is itself a change of heart*. When a person is justified by faith, he is reconciled to God, and at the same time he is in fact reconciled to God's holy law. Joyfully Ellen White said that this message of justification by faith "is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God." [2]

This is what made her happy to hear it, why she said she had heard nothing like it presented publicly in the previous 45 years. Happily this is *justification* by faith—it does not in the least downplay sanctification. Bear in mind that she declares this to be "the third angel's message in verity." [3] This is a serious call for us to study, to learn, to comprehend. What we have often said is sanctification is in reality the experience of justification by faith.

There is a beautifully logical progression of truth in this 1888 message. It follows that this experience of justification by faith must rest on some foundation stronger than the believer's feelings or works, or even choice to believe. Ephesians 2 clearly says that we are saved "by grace, *through* faith" (vs. 8). Where was that grace manifested? Titus 2:11-14 says when Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us ... " it was at the cross that His grace was manifested and His blood was shed for the world.

This is why the 1888 "messengers," A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, saw that in the purely legal or objective sense, the whole world was justified at the cross. Justification by faith cannot be a personal reality without appreciating what Christ accomplished by His sacrifice. Ellen White saw this truth as an element of the light that is yet to lighten the earth with glory.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 55, 56.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 92.

[3] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 372; *The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

Notes:

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

https://youtu.be/jVT_ypKUrSY

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