

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

***“Feed My Sheep”*: *First and Second Peter***  
**Lesson 7. Servant Leadership**

Jesus Christ is our premier example of what servant leadership in the church looks like. His self-denying love brought Him to this wicked world where He gave Himself unstintingly, holding back nothing, to the service of mankind. Jesus “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

If we possess that same attitude of humility and submission to God, Christian leaders from our local churches and all the way up to the General Conference, will exhibit the crucial characteristics vitally needed to carry the three angels’ messages forward to completion. No matter how extensive or advanced, knowledge without appropriate self-denial builds pride and does not advance the work of God.

The apostle Paul’s history provides much insight for this week’s lesson. Paul was a talented theologian with plenty of advanced knowledge and abundant zeal for what he believed was truth, but these could not progress the work of God as he exercised them prior to his conversion.

Paul accepted the prevailing opinion that Jesus was crucified as a common criminal and therefore, according to the views of the leaders of the Jews, could not be the promised Messiah. Christianity was looked upon as a pernicious superstition. That someone could rise from the grave was considered to be utter foolishness. Faith in the risen Christ was viewed as obstinacy and a religious perversity. These pestilential ideas were deemed worthy of repression and persecution because they overturned the “tradition of the elders” and threatened the established religious order of things.

By the time of Christ, the truth of the everlasting covenant given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David had long been eclipsed by tradition and legalism that supplanted pure faith in God’s power to deliver His people from sin. The Pharisees were preaching “the law until [they] were as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain” [1], while the Sadducees undermined God’s word with their doubts concerning righteousness and life after death, leaving the laypeople famished for spiritual nourishment and hope of eternal life.

The leadership—priests, Pharisees, and Sadducees—of the Jewish church had become elevated to such an exalted position that they felt that no one could question their theological proclamations. Their word was law and ought to be obeyed simply because of the high position they held in the church and community. They remained unchallenged until Christ came to town.

Jesus was the premier example of a religious teacher and humble servant to those in need. For three and a half years, He met the Jewish theologians on their own ground, bringing glad tidings to those persons who were spiritually weary and heavily burdened by the many additions to God's Commandments that these "pious" church men had formulated and stipulated as being necessary for salvation.

These Jewish leaders hounded Jesus throughout Judea and in Jerusalem, continually challenging Him to debates in hopes of finding fault in His teachings that they might openly condemn Him before the people. As Jesus' earthly ministry was nearing its end, the high priest and Sanhedrin (comparable to a "general conference" of the Jewish faith) increased their plotting to kill Him. Jesus was a threat to their cherished doctrines and power over the people. Their political and religious positions, and reputations were in serious danger if the common people continued to follow this Man from Nazareth in ever increasing numbers.

Even after Christ was killed, the danger continued through the Spirit-led disciples who had been eyewitnesses to the power of Jesus' resurrection. An emissary of those legalistic theologians who were struggling to maintain their control of the people's thinking, was Saul [hereafter referred to as Paul]. By any standard, he was a terrorist who persecuted innocent Christians simply because they chose to believe a different message than the one taught in the Temple and synagogues by the Jewish leadership.

On his way to Damascus with orders from the high priest to arrest Christians living there, Paul was in reality headed for a divine appointment. It seemed impossible that someone like Paul—young, impetuous, and so full of theological fire and self-assurance—could be humbled in the dust and turned into a servant of the One he hated. But the Lord intended to turn Paul's theological knowledge and spiritual talents for good instead of evil.

Approaching the city, "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven" and Paul had his pride adjusted when he was knocked from his horse to the ground (Acts 9:3, 4). Before and during that journey Paul was absolutely convinced of the correctness of his theological position. However, that confrontation with Jesus shook Paul to the foundation of his beliefs. He was confronted by his sin, and his need of Jesus as his Saviour was made clear to him. Paul had been "kicking against the pricks"—resisting the work of the Holy Spirit who was trying to convert Saul the fire-breathing legalist, into Paul the New Testament's humble servant leader, and foremost preacher of righteousness by faith in Christ.

Eighteen hundred and fifty years later, on a dismal rainy afternoon in 1882, young Ellet J. Waggoner sat in a gospel tent in Healdsburg, California, listening to a boring sermon. Suddenly he felt that a light illuminated the area around him, and he caught a vision of the reality of the cross of Christ, not as a dry historical event of eighteen hundred years before, but as present truth. Waggoner suddenly realized that Christ loved him and died for him personally. That singular event stirred Waggoner's heart and mind, sending him on a lifelong study of the Bible's foundational principle of the everlasting covenant.

Four years later, Waggoner began to publish his views on the two covenants in the *Signs of the Times* magazine. In these articles, he introduced ideas that were contrary to the established opinions of a large portion of the church leaders. At the 1886 General Conference session, Waggoner presented his view that the law in Galatians was the moral law. G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith (then General Conference president, and *Review and Herald* editor, respectively) took umbrage to Waggoner's position. It directly challenged their cherished view that the law in Galatians was the ceremonial law. They felt that Waggoner's view threatened the foundational teachings of the church and would seriously hinder evangelism work on the Sabbath truth.

The resulting conflict has not been much different than what occurred at the time Christ was crucified. Under the power of the early rain Peter, God's humbled servant leader, stood up and preached the risen Saviour to a doubting crowd, declaring Him to be the only means of salvation from sin. The established, prideful theologians in A.D. 34 and in 1888 attempted to stonewall the work God was completing in His remnant people. The early rain proceeded under the work of the faithful apostles, but in 1888 the beginning of the latter rain was stymied by persistent unbelief.

In 1888 two young men preached more fully the meaning of Christ's sacrifice and work of redemption. "Great truths that had lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost" were presented "in their native purity." [2] Had the church leadership in 1888 humbly and prayerfully listened to the Holy Spirit's message sent to them through A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner (and endorsed by Ellen White), then as God's servant leaders, they would have been prepared to proclaim the three angels' messages to the world under the power of the latter rain. But "an unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions," and "because of insubordination" we have had to remain in this dark world "many more years" than God intended. [3]

It remains for us to receive this latter rain power and finish the work entrusted to us as God's remnant people. We have been cautioned to "be careful, every one of you, what position you take, whether you enshroud yourselves in the clouds of unbelief because you see imperfections [in Waggoner and Jones's characters]; you see a word or a little item, perhaps, that may take place, and judge them from that. You are to see what God is doing with them, ... and then you are to acknowledge the Spirit of God that is revealed in them. And if you choose to resist it you will be acting just as the Jews acted." [4]

—Ann Walper

#### **Endnotes:**

[1] Ellen G. White, "Christ Prayed for Unity Among His Disciples," *Review and Herald*, March 11, 1890.

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

[3] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235; *Evangelism*, pp. 695, 696.

[4] *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, vol. 2, pp. 608, 609.

**Notes:**

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

<https://youtu.be/M7GdCijnNII>

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