

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Preparation for the End Time

Lesson 9. End-Time Deceptions

One of the great “end-time deceptions” brought out in Tuesday’s lesson is the immortality of the soul. If Christ did not die on His cross to pay the penalty of the sinner’s debt, then we have no atonement to unite us with God, no forgiveness of our sins, and divine *agape* is obscured.

Agape means ultimate selflessness. It makes all consideration for personal well-being entirely secondary. *Agape* chooses complete self-emptying, eternal loss, eternal death. *Agape* describes the character of God. “God is *agape* (love)” (1 John 4:8).

Could this explain what really happened on the cross? For Christ to redeem a lost world required that He pay the price for sin completely. He must stand before God in the sinner’s place, and be a condemned sinner—no longer a beloved Son. He must bear, from His standpoint as the sinner’s substitute, the Father’s frown for disobedience and wrath against sin. This meant that He must truly die, be deprived of life and consciousness, not just for three days and three nights, but for all eternity. This meant that all hope of a glad resurrection and reunion with His Father in heaven must be abandoned. Any hope of ever again enjoying heaven must be forsaken. To take the sinner’s place meant that He must endure the agony of eternal separation from the Father. The penalty for transgression of the holy and just law must involve all this.

Agape is love so great that the Godhead was willing to have all this take place on the cross of Calvary in order to make redemption for lost souls possible. The Father suffered just as much as the Son did in the gut-wrenching agony of Gethsemane and the horror of Calvary.

Did this take place when Christ paid the price for man’s redemption when He experienced the equivalent of eternal death, the penalty for sin?

In describing the agonies Christ endured on the cross Ellen White writes: “Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race.” [1]

Christ died the equivalent of the “second death” on the cross of Calvary. It is the death from which there is no resurrection (Rev. 20:6, 9, 14). Ellen White explains the agony of final separation from the Father which Christ endured: “The withdrawal of the divine

countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.” [2]

There are many in the Christian world who do not begin to understand what happened on the cross. To them the atonement involves no more than the physical agonies of the crucifixion. Terrible as these are, they do not begin to equate with the mental and emotional agony which Christ endured. Many believe that Jesus and the penitent thief enjoyed a glad reunion in the realms of glory only minutes after the crucifixion itself.

The basis for this serious error is the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul. This is why, in the matter of the atonement, this doctrine of immortality is the key deception. There is no way the atonement can be fully understood and thus effect a heart-reconciliation of the sinner with God by any who believe in the doctrine of the soul's natural immortality.

A beautiful, heaven-sent antidote for the terrible deceptions which have held captive so many minds in the Christian communion is the 1888 message of Christ our righteousness. With its emphasis upon the vital themes of salvation, the message of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner presents the New Testament gospel in a light not seen since apostolic times. [3]

While neither Ellen White nor Jones and Waggoner ever used the word *agape*, their whole message is vibrant with the *agape* theme. To give this message to the peoples of earth, “the message that God commanded to be given to the world,” [4] is to present the truths of the Bible in a setting which will appeal to hungering minds everywhere. It is in the light of this message that the deception of the immortal-soul idea, with all its related errors, will be seen for what it is. This will do much to prepare the way for the lightening of the earth with the glory of the fourth angel (Rev. 18:1-3).

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

[2] Ibid.

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

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

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/34NiPgNMXS8>

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