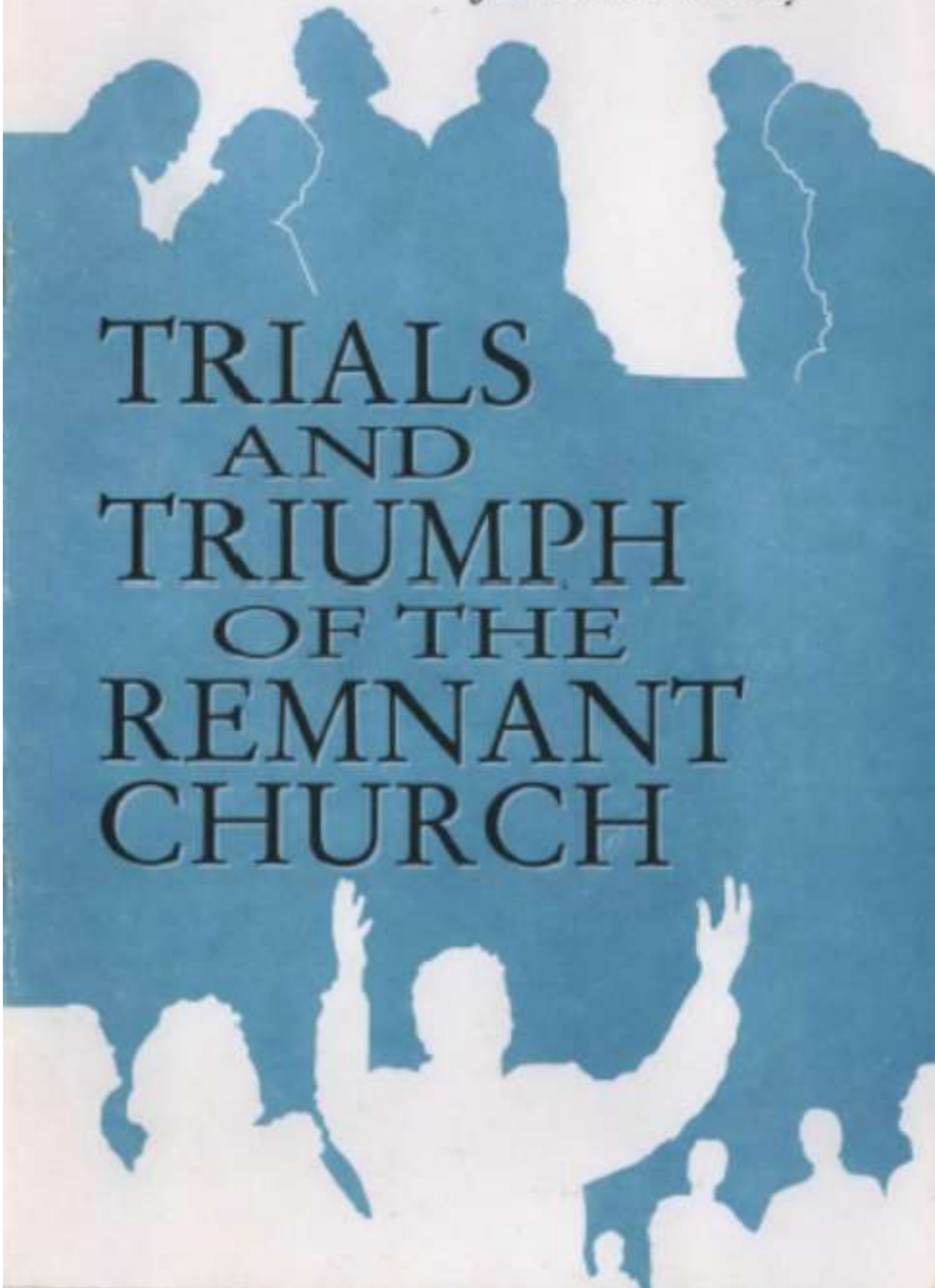


Ty Forrest Gibson

James M. Rafferty

The background of the cover features silhouettes of people. At the top, a group of five people is shown in profile, some with their heads bowed in prayer. At the bottom, a group of people is shown from the chest up, with their arms raised in praise or prayer. The central text is overlaid on a dark blue rectangular area.

TRIALS
AND
TRIUMPH
OF THE
REMNANT
CHURCH

TRIALS AND TRIUMPH OF THE REMNANT CHURCH

Ty Forrest Gibson and James M. Rafferty



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INTRODUCTION - AN OPEN LETTER

A Position Statement Regarding Tithe

Dear Friends and Supporters of Light Bearers Ministry,

Greetings in the precious name of Jesus Christ, who did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost.

Your gracious support, your encouragement, and the prayers you offer in our behalf mean so much to us. We sincerely appreciate your trust and confidence. You will be pleased to know that God's grace and your cooperation made it possible for us to publish and circulate approximately 28 million pieces of truth-filled missionary literature in 1991. We believe God has called Light Bearers Ministry to help prepare a people for the soon coming of Jesus, and we are certain that He has inspired your interest and support in this work.

Those who are familiar with Light Bearers Ministry are aware that we have never solicited tithe. Our mission is to help educate our people in the principles of successful Christian experience and to publish the everlasting gospel to the world as fast and as far as possible. To carry forth this work we have accepted whatever financial support individuals have sent us. While we have not encouraged people to send us their tithe, it is inevitable that some would do so because they feel a harmony with our mission and message. This has been the case and we have greatly appreciated the confidence thus expressed.

However, the present circumstances occurring in the church have made it necessary for us to restudy the tithe issue and to seek a more conservative position. We want to stand clearly in the light of day, allowing for no needless misunderstanding of our mission and motives.

We have carefully considered the principles of the word of God related to this topic, as well as the applicable counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy. We have also sought counsel from many individuals whom we respect as persons of wisdom and experience. Taking all into account we have concluded that it would be best for us to take an official position to request that Seventh-day Adventists not send their tithe to Light Bearers Ministry. As of June 1, 1992, we will be returning any donations marked "tithe." Of course your gifts and donations are as greatly appreciated and needed as ever.

We realize that some may have difficulty with this position, but we are convinced that it is the right decision for the ultimate good of God's church and for

the most effective furtherance of the gospel commission. We are confident that the Holy Spirit has led us to this decision.

Our conviction concerning tithing has not been arrived at under pressure from conference leadership. Before making this decision, we met with our local conference leaders twice. They shared with us their desire to see independent ministries occupy a more supportive position toward the organized church, but no agreements were made.

After these meetings a decision was made by the board of Light Bearers Ministry to have no further dialogue with any conference leaders during the time we would devote to studying the tithing issue and writing out our personal convictions. We thought this best in order to avoid confusion and rumors. This will make it impossible for the “tribe of Dan” to *justly* accuse the conference of pressuring us or to accuse us of weakly yielding to conference pressure. The conference has made no threats and given no promises to Light Bearers Ministry. Our decision concerning tithing is firmly established upon the clear teachings of Inspiration. We are confident that the Holy Spirit has been our Guide in this matter.

This booklet serves to state our position and present the inspired principles that have persuaded us that we must take this stand. We humbly request that you take the time to consider our reasons for choosing this course. Please give it more than a casual reading, preferably more than once.

In order to make a concise statement of our position, we will here share some of the key insights that have influenced us in our decision:

1. We are convinced by the testimony of Inspiration that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible Prophecy, and as such will not be succeeded by another movement. Inspiration speaks of “the sacredness of church relationship,” and urges that this “relationship is not to be lightly canceled” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 17). It is our settled conviction that “the members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant” (*Evangelism*, p. 707). The church will not be purified and made triumphant at last by efforts to prove who is right and who is wrong, but by humility and repentance. Whether or not self-supporting ministries have the right to receive tithing is not an issue worth dividing the church over. Sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice what we may think is our right in order to reveal the character of Christ and give solid evidence that we love other people more than we love ourselves. Since our acceptance of tithing is perceived as an offense, we would prefer to remove it out of the way. We want Jesus and His gospel to be the center of attention, not our acceptance of tithing. The apostle Paul operated on this principle. (See 1 Corinthians 9:11-16.)

2. The unity of the church is a matter of vital importance, second only to the of the individual believer with Christ. The Lord has led us to see that division in the church is to be avoided at any cost short of yielding the principles of truth and righteousness. Our convictions of conscience must be maintained without exception. But we are called upon by the Lord to sacrifice our amoral opinions and preferences, even if they are not necessarily intrinsically wrong, in order to maintain unity among us and avoid causing needless division. (See 1 Corinthians 1:10; John 17.)

3. Our highest objective is to reach as many perishing souls as possible with the gospel of Christ. It is inevitable that receiving tithe will tend to hinder this purpose and lessen our influence to carry it forward. It is not our desire to be perceived as enemies of the church and thus arouse unnecessary conflict or opposition. As much as lies within us, we want to live peaceably with all men. (See Romans 12:18.)

4. The receiving of tithe by self-supporting ministries is generally considered an unacceptable practice by the leadership and laity of the church. In such a circumstance we feel it is our responsibility to reveal an attitude of submission and respect. If we had a direct command from God requiring that we receive tithe, of course we would need to obey God rather than men. But since we have no such command, we believe that submission and respect are the highest principles to be obeyed in this matter. (See 1 Peter 5:5-7.)

As we are confident that you love the Lord Jesus and desire the triumph of His church, we would encourage you to look at this topic with an open mind, as we know you desire to do. We cannot afford to act from impulse or strong feelings concerning such a weighty matter. Our convictions and our practice concerning the tithe must be based on sound reasons from the word of God. Please regard this issue as of vital importance. Pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit will impress your heart with a knowledge of God's will for you. May our Lord bless and guide you in this sensitive matter.

We are your brothers in Christ,

Ty Gibson and James Rafferty,
On behalf of Light Bearers Ministry

1 - THE REMNANT CHURCH

Militant and Triumphant

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not merely a church among churches. She is in a special sense the remnant church of Bible prophecy. Her identity is unique, her mission distinct. Her existence in the world cannot be traced to the zeal of men or to the circumstances of ecclesiastical politics. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was called into existence by God Himself with no less divine providence and purpose than is seen in the calling of Israel as a chosen people.

In answer to prophecy, the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged amidst apostasy and infidelity to proclaim the three angels' messages, calling special attention to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. (See Revelation 10; Revelation 14.) Prophecy declares this movement to be the remnant church. (See Revelation 12:17.) As such, this church is not to be succeeded by another. The identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant people of God is a point of Bible truth. Most of those who unite with the Seventh-day Adventist Church do so as a matter of conviction and not merely as a convenient or randomly selected religious affiliation. Our relationship to this church is a relationship that is based on an acceptance of Bible truth. Her mission, to proclaim the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, is the very last effort of Heaven to seek and save the lost. She is the last medium of truth and mercy to the world just prior to the close of human probation. According to Bible prophecy, this church is destined to triumph, though she will be severely attacked by the devil. (See Revelation 12:17.) She will even "appear as about to fall" just prior to her final victory. (See Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 380.)

No doubt every genuine Seventh-day Adventist joined the remnant church with these convictions and hopes. But upon entering the church, it is only a matter of time before our faith in the identity and ultimate triumph of the church is challenged. As we encounter tares mingled with the wheat, goats among the sheep, and even wolves disguised in sheep's clothing, we are tempted to doubt whether we are, in fact, members of the remnant church of God. As we see departure from principle, apostasy from truth and backsliding from righteousness, we are amazed, hurt, and even angered. We may even feel a level of uncertainty that tempts us to leave the church, but we wonder in our hearts as did the disciples when tempted to forsake Jesus, "Where will we go?" We earnestly inquire, "Does God have a church?", wishing that our Lord Himself would answer. And He does:

“Has God no living church? He has a church, but it is the church militant, not the church triumphant. We are sorry that there are defective members. While the Lord brings into the church those who are truly converted, Satan at the same times brings persons who are not converted into its fellowship. While Christ is sowing the good seed, Satan is sowing the tares. There are two opposing influences continually exerted on the members of the church. One influence is working for the purification of the church, and the other for the corrupting of the people of God” (The Faith I Live By, p. 305).

“Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin. The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reprovved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard” (Testimonies to Ministers, p. 49).

“The church upon the earth is not perfect. The church militant is not the church triumphant. Earth is not heaven. The church is composed of erring men and women who will need patient, painstaking effort, that they may be educated, trained, and disciplined by precept and example, to do their work with acceptance here in this life, and to be crowned with glory and immortality in the future life” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 9, p. 154).

“The members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant” (Evangelism, p. 707).

Yes, God does have a church. But it is vital that we understand that the church has two distinct phases of existence and experience. She is now “the church militant.” All of her “members” who prove faithful are destined to become “the church triumphant.” In her “church militant” phase she is composed of wheat and tares, and is the arena of “two opposing influences.” One influence is working to purify, the other to corrupt. In the church militant there are “evils” that exist, and will continue to exist “until the end of the world.” Another term employed by the Spirit of Prophecy to describe this body of people is “the visible church” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 16). The visible Seventh-day Adventist denomination is “the church militant,” of which we are to be faithful “members” if we are to finally be part of “the Church triumphant.”

Inspiration further describes the church in its militant experience and explains how the Lord deals with her:

“Although in our churches, that claim to believe advanced truth, there are those who are faulty and erring, as tares among the wheat, God is longsuffering and patient. He reprovves and warns the erring, but He does not destroy those who

are long in learning the lesson He would teach them; He does not uproot the tares from the wheat. Tares and wheat are to grow together till the harvest; when the wheat comes to its full growth and development, and because of its character when ripened, it will be fully distinguished from the tares” (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 45, 46).

“The church militant is not now the church triumphant; but God loves His church and describes through the prophet how He opposes and resists Satan, who is clothing the children of God in the blackest and most defiled garments, and pleading for the privilege of destroying them. The angels of God were protecting them from the assaults of the enemy” (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 21, 22).

God ministers to His faithful children and suffers long with the tares among the precious wheat. He allows for the development of character, which will finally reveal a clear distinction between these two classes. It is not God’s design that the tares be uprooted prior to the harvest; “and the harvest is the end of probationary time” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 72). Yet we are to be active in our efforts to defeat the purposes of Satan in the church. How does Inspiration counsel us to engage in this work?

“It is by teaching the truth that we are to defeat the purposes of Satan. Christ illustrated this work in the parable of the sower....

“The teaching of this parable is illustrated in God’s own dealing with men and angels. Satan is a deceiver. When he sinned in heaven, even the loyal angels did not fully discern his character. This was why God did not at once destroy him. Had He done so, the holy angels would not have perceived the justice and love of God. A doubt of God’s goodness would have been as evil seed that would yield the bitter fruit of sin and woe. Therefore the author of evil was spared, fully to develop his character.

“Through long ages God has borne the anguish of beholding the work of evil. He has given the infinite Gift of Calvary, rather than let any be deceived by the misrepresentations of the wicked one, for the tares could not be plucked up without danger of uprooting the precious grain. And shall we not be as forbearing toward our fellow men as the Lord of heaven is toward Satan?

“Not condemnation and judgment of others, but humility and distrust of self, is the teaching of Christ’s parable” (The Upward Look, p. 77).

In 2 Timothy 2:15-26 we receive more detailed instruction concerning how to relate to the intrusion of evil influences which threaten to overthrow the faith of God’s people. Paul urges us to “study” and “rightly divide the word of truth” that

we might show ourselves “approved unto God.” Then, after assuring us that the “Lord knoweth them that are His,” Paul describes the church of God as a “great house,” in which “there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor.” This accurately describes the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its militant phase. Inspiration indicates this application of Paul’s metaphor:

“The ‘great house’ represents the church. In the church will be found the vile as well as the precious. The net cast into the sea gathers both good and bad” (Review and Herald vol. 4, p. 261).

Paul does not encourage us to purge ourselves from the “great house” that contains both good and bad influences, but rather to “avoid” joining with the evil that is present in “the great house.” He says that we who take the name of Christ should “depart from iniquity,” but gives no encouragement to depart from “the great house.” Then the apostle admonishes that we are not to “strive” or enter into disputes, but with a strong faith, founded on the word of God and prayer, we are to instruct in “meekness” those who are taken captive by the devil at his will. We are to “be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,” hoping that they will repent and acknowledge the truth.

It is becoming more popular to define the church as consisting of only faithful souls. In connection with this thought the idea is gaining ground that the visible Seventh-day Adventist Church, composed of both good and evil influences, is not really God’s church at all. Those who adhere to this view find it difficult to grasp or accept the plain truth of Inspiration that we have looked at so far in this chapter. When they read the usage of “the church” in a context of righteousness and sin struggling for the mastery in one body, it seems to pose a hurdle of faith and patience that cannot be overcome. But the fact remains that the inspired writings repeatedly refer to the world-wide membership of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination as “the church” of God. She is composed of wheat and tares, but she is no less the church. Does this negate those quotations that speak of the church as being composed of faithful souls? Not at all. There is a perfect harmony between both sets of quotations. The understanding gained from discerning this harmony is vital.

There are two usages of the word “church” in the Spirit of Prophecy that need to be considered in our present study. The church being referred to in a given Spirit of Prophecy statement is made evident by the kind of terminology used in the surrounding context of each quotation. First there is “the church militant,” which is the “visible,” identifiable membership of the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist denomination. This church is composed of both wheat and tares, faithful and unfaithful people. We have already noted a few quotations that speak of this

church. Then there is the invisible church, composed of only faithful souls. This church is made up of every true follower of Christ in the world. Whether Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, etc., every true and faithful person is recognized by Christ as part of His church. All who remain faithful to the end will eventually unite in one body as the visible church triumphant.

The invisible church, composed of only faithful souls, is referred to in such statements as these:

“From the beginning, faithful souls have constituted the church on earth. In every age the Lord has had His watchmen, who have borne a faithful testimony to the generation in which they lived. These sentinels gave the message of warning; and when they were called to lay off their armor, others took up the work. God brought these witnesses into covenant relation with Himself, uniting the church on earth with the church in heaven. He has sent forth His angels to minister to His church, and the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against His people” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 11).

“Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness and alienation from God that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ’s true followers are still to be found in their communion” (The Great Controversy, p. 390).

From the beginning of the great controversy, faithful souls have composed the true church of God on earth. At the present time, the great majority of God’s true people are still members of the various denominations and scattered in obscurity among the nations. In this sense they are invisible. But it is not God’s will that they remain invisible forever. All who remain faithful until the end will become a part of “the church triumphant.” For this purpose God has established in this world a “visible church” into which all the faithful may be called. Presently it is composed of wheat and tares, but when the faithful among all nations and denominations are finally called out of Babylon to unite with “the visible church,” then the tares in “the visible church” will be shaken out to join the ranks of Babylon. A great exchange will occur as company after company go out of “the visible church” and tribe after tribe of new believers come in to occupy their vacant places. “Multitudes will receive the faith and join the armies of the Lord” (Evangelism, p. 700). Concerning the present visible church membership, Inspiration clearly states that only “the members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant” (Evangelism, p. 707). These faithful members, abandoned by the tares and joined by the faithful of every nation and denomination, will finally constitute “the church triumphant.” How, then, will this change transpire, and when?

God has appointed a special test at a specific time that will finally, once and for all, separate the wheat and the tares, the gold and the dross, and thus transform the church militant into the church triumphant. As a result, all the faithful will be brought to visible notice as one united body. Give careful attention to this very important point as outlined by Inspiration:

“The time is not far distant when the test will come to every soul. The mark of the beast will be urged upon us. Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands and conformed to worldly customs will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death. The contest is between the commandments of God and the commandments of men. In this time the gold will be separated from the dross in the church” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 81).

The time of test that is to separate the gold from the dross in the church is the time when the mark of the beast will be urged upon us. Any effort or movement that seeks to separate these two groups in the church prior to the mark of the beast test is at best premature, and at worst a deception that will cause the loss of many souls. Jesus warned us not to pull up the tares prior to the harvest, lest we pull up some of the wheat in our efforts.

Before the time of final test, when the mark of the beast will be urged upon us, we should be striving to unite all who will be united upon the platform of truth and righteousness. We are to be a part of that “influence” which is “working” for “the purification of the church.” Inspiration admonishes us to exert this influence from the inside as “members” of “the church militant.”

While there have been various times throughout history when God has accomplished His purpose by “calling out” the faithful from among the unfaithful, the final separation of wheat and tares will be a “shaking out” of the unfaithful from among the faithful. The seemingly endless cycle of separating the righteous from the wicked will cease as God finally removes the wicked from the righteous by a special test of character. There will be no separation of the faithful from God’s remnant church to form another movement. Rather, the tares are to be shaken out from among the wheat.

Notice the careful wording of the following statements:

“As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel’s message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position, and join the ranks of the opposition” (The Great Controversy, p. 608).

“Soon God’s people will be tested by fiery trials, and the great proportion of those who now appear to be genuine and true will prove to be base metal. Instead of being strengthened and confirmed by opposition, threats, and abuse, they will cowardly take the side of the opposers....

To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few – this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 136).

“There will be a shaking of the sieve. The chaff must in time be separated from the wheat. Because iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold. It is the very time when the genuine will be strongest. There will be a separating from us of those who have not appreciated the light nor walked in it” (Letter 46, 1887, p. 6).

“The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out – the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths. We must be divested of our self-righteousness and arrayed in the righteousness of Christ” (Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 380).

The church militant, now composed of both wheat and tares, will finally stand triumphant and purified. All of the above quotations tell us that the sinners in the church will go out from among the faithful. They will abandon their position and join with the world against God’s people. “The majority will forsake us.” Those who are truly faithful will not forsake “the visible church,” for the honor of God is at stake.

“No advice or sanction is given in the Word of God to those who believe the third angel’s message to lead them to suppose that they can draw apart. This you may settle with yourselves forever. It is the devising of unsanctified minds that would encourage a state of disunion....

“There must be no separating [of the faithful from the church] in this great testing time” (Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 21; words in brackets added for contextual clarity).

“I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that

His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time” (Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 397).

“I know that the Lord loves His church. It is not to be disorganized or broken up into independent atoms. There is not the least consistency in this; there is not the least evidence that such a thing will be” (The Remnant Church, p. 53).

“Every truth that He has given for these last days is to be proclaimed to the world. Every pillar that He has established is to be strengthened. We cannot now step off the foundation that God has established. We cannot now enter into any new organization; for this would mean apostasy from the truth” (Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 390).

These inspired statements take into consideration the attitude and position of God’s faithful people toward the church militant until “the end of time.” God foresaw the present condition of the church when He impressed His prophet to pen these words. However great the problems among us may become, our Lord has instructed us that we are not to separate from the church. “This you may settle with yourselves forever.”

The unity of God’s church is a matter of vital importance, second only to the unity of each believer to Christ. Any issue that threatens to divide God’s people prior to the time and the test which our Lord has appointed should be considered a matter of lesser importance compared to the higher purpose of unity among us. God intends that we be united until the end of time. He intends that the mark of the beast be the testing point for our people. Any issue that we allow to become a dividing factor that does not fit into this plan will, without question, cause a needless loss of souls.

“The Lord desires us to realize that it is of great importance that we stand in these last days upon the platform of eternal truth. Those who think that the church militant is the church triumphant make a great mistake. The church militant will gain great triumphs, but it will also have fierce conflicts with evil that it may be firmly established upon the platform of eternal truth. And every one of us should be determined to stand with the church upon this platform” (The Upward Look, p. 152).

Take courage, dear friend, for “it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning” (Isaiah 4:3, 4).

2 - A "TEST" OF LOVE

A Lesson from the Experience of Moses

The experience of Moses with the children of Israel in the wilderness confronts today's independent ministries and their followers with a significant challenge. Perhaps we could call it "the straight testimony to the independent ministries."

The children of Israel had been given abundant evidence of God's care and power. He had delivered them from the cruel bondage of Egypt. The Red Sea was miraculously parted before them and closed upon their enemies. Having led them into the wilderness of freedom with the promise of sure guidance into the land of Canaan, the Lord entered into covenant relationship with His people and assured them of His love. A lowly race of slaves, the Israelites had been chosen by the God of Heaven to be exalted above all the nations of the earth. If ever a people had abundant evidence of God's calling and leading it was ancient Israel. But, lo, in the midst of such amazing providence and wonderful promise, the chosen people turned their backs to the Lord with murmuring, rebellion, and idolatry.

Once the multitude was safely encamped at the foot of Sinai, Moses was called up into the mountain to commune with God. He was instructed to gather the people together at a certain time that God might speak His covenant to them. At the time appointed the eyes of all were focused on Sinai. The whole mountain became enveloped in a thick, mysterious darkness as they watched. Then the sound of the trumpet was heard summoning the people to assemble at the base of the mountain. When they were all gathered to the solemn occasion, lightning flashed and thunder roared. There was a period of solemn silence, and then the voice of God was heard. In clear, resounding tones the ten commandment law was spoken. With fear and sincere earnestness, the people cried out, "All that the Lord hath said, we will do and be obedient" (Exodus 24:7).

Shortly after this solemn event Moses was again called up into the mountain. It was upon this occasion that he was given detailed instructions for the building of a sanctuary as a dwelling place for Jehovah's presence among His people. But while the servant of God was communing with the Lord in the mount, the people, so recently delivered and blessed, became impatient in their waiting for the return of their leader. How quickly they forgot the God who had so clearly revealed Himself to them as a mighty Deliverer and tender Father.

Finally, they felt they could no longer wait for Moses and concluded that he must have deserted them. A vast crowd surrounded the tent of Aaron, to whom Moses had delegated judicial authority in his absence. They demanded of him,

“Make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.” Exodus 32:1. What terrible ingratitude! What blatant apostasy! They had just heard the voice of God proclaiming His holy law, one precept of which forbade the making and worship of graven images. Their course can be interpreted as nothing less than willful rebellion against the clear light of divine truth.

A crisis so serious as this required firmness and courage on the part of Aaron, but he was not of such a character and proved unfaithful to God. With feelings of fear and thoughts of self-preservation, he submitted to the demanding mob and assisted them in making a golden calf to worship. No greater insult could be thrust in the face of One who had so manifestly demonstrated His love for them.

Inspiration records that “there were some who remained true to their covenant with God, but the greater part of the people joined in the apostasy. A few who ventured to denounce the proposed image making as idolatry, were set upon and roughly treated, and in the confusion and excitement they finally lost their lives” (Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 316, 317).

Aaron feared for his own life and yielded to the demands of the frenzied multitude. Considering the failure of Aaron, we read: “there are still pliant Aarons, who, while holding positions of authority in the church, will yield to the desires of the unconsecrated, and thus encourage them in sin” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 317).

In such a terrible and apparently hopeless situation, what would Moses do? What attitude would he assume toward a rebellious people? What course of action would he pursue toward them?

Inspiration gives the answer to Moses’ dilemma and in so doing tells us the answer to our dilemma as well. Carefully consider every line of the following excerpts from Patriarchs and Prophets:

“Moses in the mount was warned of the apostasy in the camp and was directed to return without delay. ‘Go, get thee down,’ were the words of God; ‘thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it.’ God might have checked the movement at the outset; but He suffered it to come to this height that He might teach all a lesson in His punishment of treason and apostasy.

“God’s covenant with His people had been disannulled, and He declared to Moses, ‘Let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may

consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.’ The people of Israel, especially the mixed multitude, would be constantly disposed to rebel against God. They would also murmur against their leader, and would grieve him by their unbelief and stubbornness, and it would be a laborious and soul-trying work to lead them through to the Promised Land. Their sins had already forfeited the favor of God, and justice called for their destruction. The Lord therefore proposed to destroy them and make of Moses a mighty nation.

“‘Let Me alone...that I may consume them,’ were the words of God. If God had purposed to destroy Israel, who could plead for them? How few but would have left the sinners to their fate! How few but would have gladly exchanged a lot of toil and burden and sacrifice, repaid with ingratitude and murmuring, for a position of ease and honor, when it was God Himself that offered the release.

“But Moses discerned ground for hope where there appeared only discouragement and wrath. The words of God, ‘Let Me alone’ he understood not to forbid but to encourage intercession, implying that nothing but the prayers of Moses could save Israel, but that if thus entreated, God would spare His people. He ‘besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth Thy wrath wax hot against Thy people, which Thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?’

“God had signified that He disowned His people. He had spoken of them to Moses as ‘thy people, which thou broughtest out of Egypt.’ But Moses humbly disclaimed the leadership of Israel. They were not his, but God’s – ‘Thy people, which Thou hast brought forth...with great power, and with a mighty hand.’...

“As Moses interceded for Israel, his timidity was lost in his deep interest and love for those for whom he had, in the hands of God, been the means of doing so much. The Lord listened to his pleadings, and granted his unselfish prayer. God had proved His servant; He had tested his faithfulness and his love for that erring, ungrateful people, and nobly had Moses endured the trial. His interest in Israel sprang from no selfish motive” (Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 317-319).

“As the people were roused to see the enormity of their guilt, terror pervaded the entire encampment. It was feared that every offender was to be cut off. Pitying their distress, Moses promised to plead once more with God for them.

“‘Ye have sinned a great sin,’ he said, ‘and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.’ He went, and in his confession before God he said, ‘Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.’ The answer was,

‘Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book. Therefore now go, lead the people into the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, Mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.’

“In the prayer of Moses our minds are directed to the heavenly records in which the names of all men are inscribed, and their deeds, whether good or evil, are faithfully registered. The book of life contains the names of all who have ever entered the service of God. If any of these depart from Him, and by stubborn persistence in sin become finally hardened against the influences of His Holy Spirit, their names will in the judgment be blotted from the book of life, and they themselves will be devoted to destruction. Moses realized how dreadful would be the fate of the sinner; yet if the people of Israel were to be rejected by the Lord, he desired his name to be blotted out with theirs; he could not endure to see the judgments of God fall upon those who had been so graciously delivered....

“Moses knew well the perversity and blindness of those who were placed under his care; he knew the difficulties with which he must contend. But he had learned that in order to prevail with the people, he must have help from God. He pleaded for a clearer revelation of God’s will and for an assurance of His presence: ‘See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight: and consider that this nation is Thy people.’

“The answer was, ‘My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.’ But Moses was not yet satisfied. There pressed upon his soul a sense of the terrible results should God leave Israel to hardness and impenitence. He could not endure that his interests should be separated from those of his brethren, and he prayed that the favor of God might be restored to His people, and that the token of His presence might continue to direct their journeyings: ‘If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth’....

“And the Lord said, ‘I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name’....

“Again he entreated that God would pardon the iniquity of His people, and take them for His inheritance. His prayer was granted. The Lord graciously promised to renew His favor to Israel, and in their behalf to do marvels such as had not been done ‘in all the earth, nor in any nation’” (Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 326-329).

“Moses was then tested and proved of God. Forsake Israel? Come out from among them, and leave them in their rebellion and sin? — No, never.

“These things are written for our ensamples upon whom the ends of the world are come. We see the unbelief, and the stout resistance of some who have had great light, and although evidence has been piled upon evidence they have kept themselves in stubborn resistance. The Lord has sent messages of warning and entreaty, messages of reproof and rebuke, and they have not been in vain. But we have never had a message that the Lord would disorganize the church” (Review and Herald, vol. 3, pp. 85-86).

“In the example of Moses pleading for the children of Israel, is represented the position that we should take in regard to the people of God, however erring, or weak, or defective they may be. By the mighty cleaver of truth, the Lord has brought out a people from the quarry of the world, as He brought out of Egypt a people to keep His commandments, and at every step He has shown them that He is leading them in paths of truth and righteousness. He has sent His light and His counsels, instructing them to build institutions of learning, to provide sanitariums and publishing houses, and success has attended the carrying out of these plans. The money of the Seventh-day Adventists has not been hoarded in order that they might live delicately, but self-denial and self-sacrifice have marked their history, and still their work is to make progress, and to be aggressive. The world have a light constantly shining upon them, because this people honor God in keeping His commandments. Now can we expect that a message would be true that would designate as Babylon the people for whom God has done so much? Hell would triumph should such a message be received, and the world would be strengthened in iniquity. All the reproaches which Satan has cast upon the character of God, would appear as truth, and the conclusion would be made that God has no chosen or organized church in the world. O, what a triumph would this be to Satan and his confederacy of evil! God does not work in this way” (Review and Herald, vol. 3, p. 86).

We stand today where Moses stood. His test has now become our own. Do we discern ground for hope where there appears to be only cause for discouragement and wrath? Do we love this church enough to die for it rather than be saved without it? Do we long for the salvation of our brethren with a love that refuses to abandon them?

Search your heart, dear Seventh-day Adventist friend. Do you love God’s church? Will you quickly give her up to a failure that God has never foretold? Have you not been glad for the mercy of God toward your own soul? Do you inquire, “But how can God use the church in its present condition and considering her past

failures?" If so, we invite you to ask yourself a similar question in the honest privacy of your own soul: "How can God use me in my present condition and considering my past failures?" Only the merciful will receive mercy, dear friend.

No, the failures in our personal lives are no justification for the failures of the church. But the point is, we are all in need of repentance and humility. We are all in need of a mutual attitude of mercy and oneness as a people.

Are you one of the "few" who will follow the example of Moses, or will you leave sinners to their fate? Will you choose the lot of "toil, burden and sacrifice" to seek the restoration of those who may respond with "ingratitude and murmuring?" Will you choose the course of unselfish love manifested in the prayer of Moses? If the latter is your choice, then you will soon find, if you haven't already, that the greatest battle ever fought is not the battle against those in apostasy in the church, but the battle against self. In the midst of his struggle against darkness and error, Martin Luther faced reality when he said, "I fear self more than the pope and all his bishops." Today we are confronted with the same searching reality, for "to deal patiently with the tempted requires us to battle with self" (Evangelism, p. 631).

Some reason that our relationship to the visible church is not a matter of personal salvation, and therefore cannot be a matter of great importance. What matters, they say, is our faithfulness to Christ. True, we are not saved by church membership, but by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "No denominational name has any virtue to bring us into favor with God. We are saved individually as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Review and Herald, vol. 2, p. 464). But really, isn't there something more important than my personal salvation, and yours? Indeed, there is. Moses was of such a heart as to desire the salvation of rebellious sinners more than his own. Christ did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost. No, you may not be lost if you separate yourself from God's church, but someone else may be lost due to your absence. If you truly know the truth and the Author of truth, then He has made you a steward of His saving grace, a channel of light and love. You are responsible to employ your God-given gifts and endowments to draw others to Jesus. To separate from those who need what you possess is to abandon them to possible doom while you might have been an instrument in the hand of God to help work out their redemption. Moses was willing to risk the loss of his own eternal life to secure the favor of God to His people. The love of Moses for his people led him to conclude that he would rather be lost with them than saved without them. Imagine what our demise would be if Jesus chose to deal with us as we deserve. Then, ask your heavenly Father to give you the heart of Moses.

We urge you, dear friend, do not fail the test of God upon your soul. Do not give up hope and turn your back to those who need to see the compassion and righteousness of God's character in you. Do not suppose that God will abandon the church He has guided and labored with for over 150 years and make of you or your favorite independent ministry "a great nation," or a new movement.

The Lord is watching to see if you will gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason. Will you love the church as Christ has loved you? Perhaps the restoration and salvation of modern Israel is dependent on your intercession for her and a willingness on your part to sacrifice your own eternal life to secure her favor with God. On the other hand, perhaps your own salvation is weighing in the balances of heaven dependent on the position you take toward the church in this solemn time of testing.

Whatever the case may be, of this we are certain: Moses was a man of God, a follower of the Lamb, Christ Jesus. Dear friend, are you preparing to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb? If so, you must be learning the love of Moses and the Lamb for God's church, for their song is one of experience. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 649.)

3 - “WE OR “THEY”?

A lesson from the Experience of Daniel

In our previous chapter we gave special attention to the attitude of Moses toward a rebellious and stiff-necked people. The attitude of Daniel toward the same people at a different time of trial in their history gives us added insight into God’s will for us today.

Often we are at a loss for wisdom to know what to do in a given circumstance and we long for divine guidance. At the present time many Seventh-day Adventists are deeply wondering what attitude we should be seeking to maintain toward the church. We look around us and see the varying attitudes that others are taking and we wonder which attitude we should assume. One says that we must openly and without hesitation expose and denounce the failings of the church. Another says that all is well and that we should be about our own business and not meddle in the affairs of others. Whose example should we follow? Who is truly led of the Lord?

While we may not be sure of any present example we see, we know that Daniel was a man of God and one whose attitude toward the sins of God’s church is safe for us to follow.

Before quoting Daniel’s prayer, the Spirit of Prophecy comments on the attitude of heart that characterized the petition of this holy man:

“In his petition he identified himself fully with those who had fallen short of the divine purpose, confessing their sins as his own....

“Though Daniel had long been in the service of God, and had been spoken of by heaven as ‘greatly beloved,’ yet he now appeared before God as a sinner, urging the great need of the people he loved. His prayer was eloquent in its simplicity, and intensely earnest. Hear him pleading:

“O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants the prophets, which spake in Thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

“O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither Thou has driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against Thee....

“To the Lord our God belongs mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him.’ ‘O Lord, according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

“Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake. O my God, incline Thine ear, and hear; open Thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Thy name: for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousness, but for Thy great mercies.

“O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name.’ Daniel 9:4-9, 16-19” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 555, 556).

The prayer of Daniel reveals the highest quality of love that can be experienced by human beings for one another – a love that is willing to be held responsible by God for the sins of others. Possibly the greatest selfishness that can be manifested is a disposition to cast blame on others and refuse to identify with them in their sins. Such an attitude reveals a great lack of understanding and a stark absence of humble self-awareness. When we comprehend the sins of others aright, we shall realize that their guilt is really our own as well. Our inclination to accuse and condemn is actually an effort to evade the reality of our own sinfulness. Daniel’s prayer revealed a conscious humility that freely acknowledged that he was no better than those for whom he pleaded.

This same understanding is seen in the humble attitude of Ellen White as she identified herself with the remnant church. Give attentive heed to her words:

“I am filled with sadness as I think of our condition as a people. The Lord has not closed heaven to us, but our own course of continual backsliding has separated us from God” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 217).

Notice, she does not say “they,” but “us.” She, like Daniel and Moses, so closely united her interests with the church that she regarded herself as part of the

“condition” of “backsliding.” She considered herself part of the problem and did not boast of being the answer.

We so need to understand and experience this attitude, else we are in great danger of being swept away into a spiritual pride that will work our ruin. If, indeed, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God’s church, and if we believe in the patience and power of God to bear with and change our own hearts and lives, then is it not far from righteousness for us to turn from the church with disgust and reproach because of her failures?

The prophets, priests, kings, and reformers raised up to bring revival and reformation to Israel maintained an attitude such as Daniel possessed. Ezra, when confronted with the apostasy of Israel, afflicted himself and interceded before God in behalf of the guilty. He plucked off the hairs of his head and beard and said, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens” (Ezra 9:6).

This man of God supplicated the throne of grace as though he were guilty. Ezra claimed the sins of his people as his own. His attitude led him to say “our” sin. He experienced “weeping” before the Lord on behalf of his people. Such a spirit was not without affect. (See Ezra 10.) The Bible states that “the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Ezra prayed with the same spirit as did Daniel, who was “not exalting himself or claiming any goodness: ‘O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God.’ This is what James calls the effectual, fervent prayer” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 534).

And such was the experience of Nehemiah in his work to bring reformation and revival to Israel. “In their work, Ezra and Nehemiah humbled themselves before God, confessing their sins and the sins of their people, and entreating pardon as if they themselves were the offenders” (Prophets and Kings, p. 677). The attitude of Ezra and Nehemiah is a type of the work to be “wrought in the closing days of this earth’s history” (Ibid). Like these men raised up of God, we too are called to identify ourselves with the weaknesses and failures of the church and maintain a humble recognition that we, not they, have sinned.

“The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place. When this reformation begins, the spirit of prayer will actuate every believer and will banish from the church the spirit of discord and strife. Those who have not been living in Christian fellowship will draw close to one another. One member working in right lines will lead other members to unite with him in making intercession for the revelation of the Holy Spirit. The barriers separating believer from believer will be broken down, and God’s servants will speak the same things. The Lord will co-

operate with His servants. All will pray understandingly the prayer that Christ taught His servants: 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.' Matthew 6:10" (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 251).

We shall never bring the church to humility and repentance by condemning her as beyond hope. Nor will we secure the mercy of God to our own souls while we have no mercy for those whom God is seeking to restore. We must consider the sins and failings of the church to be our own if we are to have a voice that wins and draws our brothers and sisters to Christ.

"In the church militant men will be ever in need of restoration from the results of sin. The one who in some respects is superior to another is in other respects inferior to him. Every human being is subject to temptation and in need of brotherly interest and sympathy. The exercise of mercy in our daily relations with one another is one of the most effective means of attaining perfection of character, for only those who walk with Christ can be truly merciful" (In Heavenly Places, p. 290).

We may find in the end that many who are finally lost for eternity were kept from the Saviour and driven to more stubborn rebellion by the accusing attitudes of those who said they instead of we.

4 - "MINE HAND SHALL NOT BE UPON THE LORD'S ANOINTED"

A Lesson from the Experience of David

The story of David and Saul holds great insight for the people of God today. Saul was chosen by God to reign as the first king of Israel. This calling of God to Saul was in answer to the carnal desire of the people to have a king like all the other nations of the world. Saul was a humble man and of a character and stature to be respected by the people. But once chosen by God to occupy this high position of responsibility, Saul became proud and began to covet the glory due to God alone. Yet the people had demanded a king, and God granted their request with the clear warning that tragedy would be the result.

As Saul sunk deeper and still deeper into apostasy, the people experienced a proportional spiritual decline. Scripture records that God bore long with Saul and that he was indeed the anointed of the Lord as long as he occupied the position granted him by God. But the Lord had a plan for the spiritual restoration of His people. Even while Saul was yet in sacred office, God had chosen another to succeed the proud king and lead the people to reverence Him as their true King and Lord. David, a common shepherd boy, was a man after God's own heart. He was the chosen of God, while Saul was still the Lord's anointed.

The account of David's attitude toward Saul reveals the proper regard that today's independent ministries ought to maintain for those whom God has placed in sacred office as leaders of His church. It would be extreme for us to make an exact comparison between Saul and the general church leadership of today, but the comparison does exist in basic principle and relationship. As there are Judases and rash Peters among us, so, no doubt, there are Sauls among us as well. The point is, if we see failure, or even apostasy, in men occupying responsible positions in the church, David has given us an example of what our attitude toward them ought to be.

Saul knew in his inmost heart that David was called of God. David knew he was called of God as well. But David also knew that Saul was the anointed king whom God had set in office. While Saul sought with vehement determination to destroy David, David's conscience forbade him to pursue a similar course toward Saul.

Scripture records that David had great influence with the people of Israel and had ample opportunity to destroy Saul. On one occasion while hunting David like a wild beast, Saul stepped into a cave where David and his men were hiding. David's men urged him to slay Saul, assuming that the providence of God was

making Saul an easy victory for David. (See 1 Samuel 24:4.) “David was tempted to take this view of the matter; but the voice of conscience spoke to him, saying, ‘Touch not the anointed of the Lord’” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 661). While David did not kill Saul, he did touch the Lord’s anointed in such a way as to cause his conscience to condemn him afterward. “‘David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe privily.’ But His conscience smote him afterward, because he had even marred the garment of the king” (Ibid.).

In cutting off Saul’s robe, David exposed the king to humiliation and shame before the people. Today we see a similar course being pursued by some well-meaning “Davids,” encouraged by loyal followers. Does not the same Holy Spirit that smote the heart of David still speak to the consciences of men today?

It is important to note that those who encouraged David to Kill Saul were men who were in “distress,” in “debt,” and “discontented,” as well as David’s family members. (See 1 Samuel 22: 1, 2.) It is likely that these negative conditions experienced by David’s men were the result of Saul’s apostasy. Yet, it becomes obvious that the feelings of David’s men were not in harmony with the will of God, in spite of Saul’s state of apostasy. In encouraging David to attack Saul, his men were taking the work of judgment into their own hands.

Inspiration warns in this context: “God permits men to be placed in positions of responsibility. When they err, He has power to correct or to remove them. We should be careful not to take into our hands the work of judging that belongs to God” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 484).

Not only was David’s attitude toward Saul distinctly opposite to that of his men, but inspiration says that David went one step further. David spoke and acted in such a manner as to discourage his men from hurting Saul, maintaining that he was the Lord’s anointed. (See 1 Samuel 24:7.) God had called and anointed Saul, and though in apostasy, he was still to be treated with deference and respect.

“The conduct of David toward Saul has a lesson. By command of God, Saul had been anointed as king over Israel. Because of his disobedience the Lord declared that the kingdom should be taken from him; and yet how tender and courteous and forbearing was the conduct of David toward him!” (Ibid).

After Saul left the cave, David called out, “My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself” (1 Samuel 24:8). David’s conscience had smitten him for cutting off Saul’s skirt, and now he humbly renders a gesture of honor to the apostate king. Some might argue that David had gone too far in this matter and that God did not move upon David’s heart to yield such respect to this proud wicked leader. Such have not learned the

meekness of Christ. The Spirit of Prophecy clearly states that David was led of the Lord to follow this humble course. Notice:

“The course of David made it manifest that he had a Ruler whom he obeyed. He could not permit his natural passions to gain the victory over him; for he knew that he that ruleth his own spirit, is greater than he who taketh a city. If he had been led and controlled by human feelings, he would have reasoned that the Lord had brought his enemy under his power in order that he might slay him, and take the government of Israel upon himself. Saul’s mind was in such a condition that his authority was not respected, and the people were becoming irreligious and demoralized. Yet the fact that Saul had been divinely chosen king of Israel kept him in safety, for David conscientiously served God, and he would not in any wise harm the anointed of the Lord” (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 1021).

After bowing before Saul, David cried out, “Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord’s anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee” (1 Samuel 24:9-13). David understood the truth long afterward spoken by the apostle Paul: “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:20, 21).

The humble and respectful attitude of David had a piercing effect upon Saul’s heart. In response to David’s overture Saul confessed, “Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? Wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand” (1 Samuel 24:17-20).

If the principles of righteousness are the same today as in the days of David and Saul; if the Holy Spirit still moves with the same convictions of conscience upon our hearts, then the attitude and conduct of David toward Saul is as

acceptable and pleasing to God now as then. Is not this our great need as a people today? Is there not need of men like David who will yield due respect to the anointed of the Lord in His church and thus encourage a responsive humility that might lead us all to a united repentance?

If the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the modern Israel of God – His visible, militant church – then are not its leaders allowed to occupy their position by God Himself? If so, are we at liberty to “slay” their influence and divert the respect of the people from them to ourselves? And if we have done so, does our conscience smite us? And if not, was David’s conscience over-sensitive?

While we believe God has called Light Bearers Ministry to do a certain work in the church and in the world, we are also deeply convicted that the leadership of this denomination is “the anointed of the Lord.” We feel it needful to yield due respect and exercise Christian courtesy toward those who occupy positions of authority in God’s cause. We realize that this may seem a bit extreme to some, but we are confident that at this time in our experience the Holy Spirit has moved upon our hearts in this matter as He did upon the heart of David. Search your heart as well, dear follower of Jesus, and see if the Spirit speaks to you in like manner.

5 - "WHAT DOEST THOU HERE"

A lesson from the Experience of Elijah

The attitude of Moses and that of Daniel led them to intercede for the rebellious people whom they loved more than their own lives. In contrast to their spirit of intercession to God for Israel, the prophet Elijah, at one point in his ministry, developed a spirit of "intercession to God against Israel" (Romans 11:2). Let us recall the account to which Paul is referring in this passage.

An apostasy as dark as midnight had imprisoned the people of God in heathen idolatry. Rebellion and sin had stolen from their hearts the true knowledge of God. The evil influences bearing sway at that time were exceedingly great, comparable to nothing modern Israel has ever had to face. At a time such as this, light must shine, a distinct voice must be heard. Elijah was commissioned of God to call for revival, repentance, and reformation. At the appointed time both leaders and people of the nation gathered to Mount Carmel at the specific summons of God's prophet. Elijah faithfully delivered the message of truth appropriate for the crisis. God manifested His approval of Elijah's message. The false prophets were defeated.

Just after the conflict and victory at Mount Carmel, Elijah was led by the Holy Spirit to run before the chariot of Ahab, thus manifesting respect and deference for the visible leader of Israel. "In this gracious act of God's messenger shown to a wicked king is a lesson for all who claim to be servants of God, but who are exalted in their own estimation" (Prophets and Kings, p. 158). Elijah violated no principle by yielding a gesture of such high respect in his recognition of King Ahab. In fact, in the performance of this humble deed he was prompted by the "hand of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:46).

Today, the general body of visible leadership in God's church can with no just comparison be likened to the wicked King Ahab, but the comparison does exist in basic principle and relationship. And no doubt some feel an exact comparison is just. Even if the blatant wickedness of Ahab was mirrored in the leadership of modern Israel, the principles of Christian character would still mandate a respectful recognition of those whom our Lord has allowed to occupy positions of governance in His church. It would be well for every modern "Elijah" who feels a burden for contemporary Israel to contemplate the unselfish overture of God's prophet in this matter. Let each one inquire, "What gestures of respect and deference might be God's will for me to manifest toward those whom He has placed in positions of church leadership?" Elijah's example in this instance is a challenge to us all and cannot be ignored without hazard.

King Ahab was impressed with the events of the Mount Carmel demonstration. His heart was moved by the humble, respectful attitude which Elijah manifested toward him. Upon his arrival to the royal palace, he shared with Jezebel his conviction that Elijah must be God's true prophet. Jezebel rejected the appeal and demanded that Elijah be put to death. That night Elijah received word that the evil queen was determined to have him slain before the end of the next day.

This same Elijah who ran before Ahab's chariot, now ran into the wilderness, but this running was not prompted by the Lord. Once he arrived at the place of his hiding, God asked him, through a still small voice, "what doest thou here?" Seeking to defend his position, and no doubt feeling totally justified and led by God to abandon the trying situation, he began his "intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:2-5).

Inspiration magnifies the lessons that may be learned from the experience of Elijah. Give careful consideration to these inspired insights:

"It would seem that after showing courage so undaunted, after triumphing so completely over king and priests and people, Elijah could never afterward have given way to despondency nor been awed into timidity. But he who had been blessed with so many evidences of God's loving care was not above the frailties of mankind, and in this dark hour his faith and courage forsook him.... The prophet now fled for his life...

"Elijah should not have fled from his post of duty. He should have met the threat of Jezebel with an appeal for protection to the One who had commissioned him to vindicate the honor of Jehovah.... Had he remained where he was, had he made God his Refuge and Strength, standing steadfast for the truth, he would have been shielded from harm. The Lord would have given him another signal victory by sending His judgments on Jezebel; and the impression made on the king and the people would have wrought a great reformation.

"Not until Elijah had learned to trust wholly in God could he complete his work for those who had been seduced into Baal worship. The signal triumph on the heights of Carmel had opened the way for still greater victories; yet from the wonderful opportunities opening before him, Elijah had been turned away by the threat of Jezebel. The man of God must be made to understand the weakness of

his present position as compared with the vantage ground the Lord would have him occupy.

“God met His tried servant with the inquiry, ‘What doest thou here, Elijah? I sent you to the brook Cherith and afterward to the widow of Sarepta. I commissioned you to return to Israel and to stand before the idolatrous priests on Carmel, and I girded you with strength to guide the chariot of the king to the gate of Jezreel. But who sent you on this hasty flight into the wilderness? What errand have you here?’

“In bitterness of soul Elijah mourned out his complaint: ‘I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’ ...

“The Lord answered Elijah that the wrongdoers in Israel should not go unpunished. Men were to be especially chosen to fulfill the divine purpose in the punishment of the idolatrous kingdom. There was stern work to be done, that all might be given opportunity to take their position on the side of the true God. Elijah himself was to return to Israel, and share with others the burden of bringing about a reformation....

“Elijah had thought that he alone in Israel was a worshiper of the true God. But He who reads the hearts of all revealed to the prophet that there were many others who, through the long years of apostasy, had remained true to Him. ‘I have left Me,’ God said, ‘seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him’” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 159, 160, 167-170).

There is no doubt—and all who have eyes to see and ears to hear will freely confess—that the church of God is in need of revival and reformation. It is equally beyond question that the Lord will call men to awaken the church to this need and educate our people in the true principles of Christian experience. All who feel called to such a ministry must consider the experience of Elijah and be warned by his failure.

Elijah expected to see “a speedy reform throughout Israel” (Ibid., p. 160), and because there was not, he lost patience and faith and actually became one of the greatest hindrances to the reformation that God was working out in His time and way. Instead of standing in the midst of Israel and interceding for her and pleading for her repentance with God, he vacated his post of duty and turned his heart “against” the chosen people. He began to imagine that he was the only one faithful to the Lord, or at least close to it. But God reproved him for his blindness and

assured him that there were many others in Israel who loved the true God and served Him with faithfulness.

“Hope and courage are essential to perfect service for God. These are the fruit of faith. Despondency is sinful and unreasonable. God is able and willing ‘more abundantly’ (Hebrews 6:17) to bestow upon His servants the strength they need for test and trial. The plans of the enemies of His work may seem to be well laid and firmly established, but God can overthrow the strongest of these. And this He does in His own time and way, when He sees that the faith of His servants has been sufficiently tested” (Ibid., p. 164).

God has not lost control. He is eager and able to bring about a revival and reformation in His time and way, and He fully intends to do so. Be assured, He does have many faithful servants in the church. The realization of these things ought to bring hope and encouragement to our hearts.

Dear friend, this is no time to lose heart and run away, as did Elijah. Nor can we now become angry and begin hurling our “thunderbolts” of condemnation and denunciation against “the church militant.” (See Review and Herald, vol. 6, pp. 515, 516.) God is yet determined to show forth the full and final display of His glory through His remnant church. Inspiration promises that “the great issue so near at hand will weed out those whom God has not appointed and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain” (Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 385). With such an encouraging hope placed before us, let us intercede for modern Israel and never be found forsaking our post of duty in the church.

6 - HUMILITY AND HOPE

A Lesson from the Experiences of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah

Three of the most prominent prophets in the Old Testament are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These men of God gave solemn messages to His people in the time leading up to and following the Babylonian captivity. The prevailing sin and apostasy that characterized the period in which they lived and ministered challenged their faith in Israel as the chosen people of God. They had abundant cause to doubt the possibility that a future restoration was possible. This same challenge meets God's people today.

The Experience of Isaiah

At one point in his experience, Isaiah was so overwhelmed with the sins of God's professed people that he was in danger of falling short of his high calling. As Moses, wearied with the murmurings of the people against God, spoke unadvisedly with his lips, so Isaiah was in danger of sinning against God in a similar manner.

In Isaiah chapter six we read the account of how God revealed to His servant a vision of the heavenly temple. Isaiah's eyes were directed heavenward. As he beheld the glory of God he came to the distinct realization that he was "undone." Why did Isaiah feel so humbled? He explains, "For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." As a result of casting his eyes upon Jesus, Isaiah realized that he, like his people, had fallen short of God's glory. Only when his eyes were taken off the sins of others and placed upon the true standard for all mankind could Isaiah begin to understand his true position before God.

"As the prophet Isaiah beheld the glory of the Lord, he was amazed, and, overwhelmed with a sense of his own weakness and unworthiness, he cried, 'Woe is me? For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.' Isaiah 6:5.

"Isaiah had denounced the sin of others; but now he sees himself exposed to the same condemnation he had pronounced upon them. He had been satisfied with a cold, lifeless ceremony in his worship of God. He had not known this until the vision was given him of the Lord" (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 1138, 1139).

It was not until Isaiah focused the attention of his heart upon the character of Jesus that he realized the magnitude of his own guilt and condemnation. Then, when he saw and felt his own need of reformation, the prophet of God was prepared to be purged from his sins and labor for his people.

“Did he think himself unworthy before he had a view of God’s glory? – No; he imagined himself in a righteous state before God; but when the glory of the Lord of hosts was revealed to him, when he beheld the inexpressible majesty of God, he said, ‘Then said I, Woe is me? For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.’ Isaiah 6:5-7” (Ibid., vol. 4, p. 1139).

The experience of Isaiah reveals the will of God for us all. “The vision given to Isaiah represents the condition of God’s people in the last days” (Ibid.). Not only so, but it speaks of a genuine, heartfelt attitude we are to reflect toward others who are falling short of God’s glory. If we truly know the character of Jesus, we will realize that we are really no more righteous than anyone else. As we keep our eyes on the Saviour long enough for self to die, and consistently enough to keep it from raising its ugly head again, we will enter into a genuine experience of humility before God and men.

“This is not that voluntary humility and servile self-reproach that so many seem to consider it a virtue to display. This vague mockery of humility is prompted by hearts full of pride and self-esteem. There are many who demerit themselves in words, who would be disappointed if this course did not call forth expressions of praise and appreciation from others. But the conviction of the prophet [Isaiah] was genuine. As humanity, with its weakness and deformity, was brought out in contrast with the perfection of divine holiness and light and glory, he felt altogether inefficient and unworthy. How could he go and speak to the people the holy requirements of Jehovah, who was high and lifted up, and whose train filled the temple?” (Ibid., vol. 4, p. 1140).

The law of beholding reacts on every human being, for weal or for woe. If we make Jesus Christ and the great plan of salvation the constant theme of our thoughts and conversation, we will be changed into His glorious image. On the other hand, if we think and talk of the sins and failings of others, we will become self-righteous and cynical, while adopting the very attributes we condemn in them. “The very act of looking for evil in others develops evil in those who look” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 492). Will we individually learn from Isaiah’s experience and

keep our eyes focused upon Jesus rather than on the sins of others? Inspiration exhorts us to do this very thing:

“By beholding we become changed into the image of that upon which we dwell; then let us turn away our eyes from beholding the imperfections of those who are in the church, but who have not the likeness of Christ. We shall not be held responsible because those who make a high profession do not possess corresponding virtues.... By beholding and copying the perfect Model, we shall present to the world a character that is Christlike. We have much desired that others should possess such a character, and have been greatly perplexed because they did not manifest Christlikeness in their life; but let us see to it that others are not perplexed at seeing this same lack in our own character....

“In this world we shall become hopelessly perplexed [as the devil wants us to be], if we keep looking upon those things that are perplexing; for by dwelling upon them, and talking of them, we become discouraged. In criticizing others because they fail to manifest love, we shall kill the precious plant of love in our own hearts. Have we individually appreciated and felt the warmth of love which Christ represented in His life? Then it is our duty to manifest this love to the world. Let us fear to dwell upon, to behold and talk of the great mistakes that others are making by not manifesting love to their brethren and sisters. Spend as little time over this question as possible; but be sure to give due attention to the precious truths which come to us from lips that have been touched with a live coal from off the altar. Praise God that light has been sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Talk of the instruction that you have received that was to your soul as a feast of fat things....

“It is not an uncommon thing to see imperfection in those who carry on God’s work. Go into any place where there is a large church, where there are important interests at stake, as there are at Battle Creek, and there we may behold the deep plottings of Satan; but this should not lead us to dwell upon the imperfections of those who yield to his temptations. Would it not be more pleasing to God to take an impartial outlook, and see how many souls are serving God, and glorifying and honoring Him with their talents of means and intellect? Would it not be better to consider the wonderful, miracle-working power of God in the transformation of poor, degraded sinners, who have been full of moral pollution, who become changed so that they are Christ-like in character, partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust?

“We become changed into the image of that upon which we dwell. Then how important to open our hearts to the things that are true and lovely and of good report. Let into the heart the light of the Sun of Righteousness. Do not cherish one root of bitterness that may spring up whereby many may be defiled. The most

unfavorable matters that are developed in Battle Creek or elsewhere should not cause us to feel perplexed and discouraged. Everything that causes us to see the weakness of humanity is in the Lord's purpose to help us to look to Him, and in no case put our trust in man, or make flesh our arm" (Manuscript Release No. 491).

By leading us to dwell on the various failures and problems among our people, Satan will steal away from our hearts all hope for the church. Some have feasted their minds upon heresies and scandals so much that it has become impossible for them to believe the plainest inspired statements concerning the Church's triumphant destiny. There are those who have made up their minds that there is no hope for the church, regardless of what God says.

The Experience of Ezekiel

Upon his exodus from Adventism, one man stated that he thought the church was just a "dead horse" whose probation had closed. "You can ride a dead horse if you want to," he said, "but I'm not going to." The prophet Ezekiel was given a special parable that likens the church to a valley of dry bones, a similar metaphor to the "dead horse" idea. A careful look at Ezekiel's vision reveals the true purpose of God for His church as well as the attitude He would have us maintain until this purpose is accomplished.

Ezekiel was taken off in vision to an open valley in which he was show "very many" bones that were "very dry" (Ezekiel 37:2). Then he was asked the question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Verse 3). The prophet's response to this question shows the attitude that actually qualified him to be God's messenger. He did not answer the Lord with doubt, saying, "No, they cannot live; they are dead and there is no hope of revival." Ezekiel answered with simple faith, "O Lord God, Thou knowest" (Verse 3).

Do we reveal the same attitude as Ezekiel in relation to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? If we think that the church is dead beyond revival, due to its appearance and problems, we will surely not work for its restoration and final triumph. Only as we leave in God's hands the judgment of those who are failing to follow the light of truth can we go forth and speak to dead bones, hoping and believing that they can live if God so wills.

"Again He said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord....So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said He unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to

the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:4, 7-12).

The obedience of Ezekiel in giving the word of the Lord, regardless of the outward appearance of things, is one that we should take to heart today. Many times we are quick to judge our situation as hopeless and therefore fail to put forth the appropriate efforts for revival. Are we following Ezekiel's example of hope as we look upon the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Do we believe that these bones, this church, can live according to the will of God? Or do we doubt the power of our Lord to accomplish His purpose through the church as He says He will?

The parable of the dry bones speaks with special force to all who are uncertain as to the plan of God for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for Inspiration says that Ezekiel's vision applies to "those who have been blessed with great light; for they also are like the skeletons of the valley. They have the form of men, the framework of the body, but they have not spiritual life.... These bones represent the house of Israel, the church of God, and the hope of the church is the vivifying influence of the Holy Spirit" (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 1165, 1166).

When Ezekiel obeyed the word of the Lord and prophesied of revival and life as he was commanded, there was "a shaking, and the bones came together, ...and stood up upon their feet an exceeding great army." Here we have a Biblical representation of the shaking of the church and the uniting of the faithful to give the loud cry of the third angel's message. Ellen White was shown the shaking of the church and the final outcome. She described a people "who were mightily shaken." After their trying ordeal had passed, she said "they moved in exact order, firmly, like a company of soldiers" (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, pp. 180-184). We can praise God for the promise of what will be in the future; but we must also learn to trust Him in the present. Though she is to pass through severe trials, the remnant church of God is destined to glorious triumph.

In the light of this prophecy, it behooves each one of us to examine ourselves closely to see if our hearts are girded with the hope of Ezekiel. Only as we learn the lesson that the example of Ezekiel teaches will we be qualified to be part of the "exceeding great army" that will accomplish the purpose of God on earth.

The following quotation is of great interest in this context:

“God will rebuke Satan, refusing to hear his accusations against His church, even though she is far from what she should be. Standing before God in filthy garments, Joshua well represents the condition of God’s ministers and the lay members of the church. They need to be revived and reformed. They need to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Those who continue in the service of God will, through the revival of God’s appointed agencies, return to whole-hearted obedience, depending on the merits of a crucified Saviour and trusting in His atonement for salvation....

“The church has failed, sadly failed, to meet the expectations of her Redeemer, and yet the Lord does not withdraw Himself from His people. He bears with them still, not because of any goodness found in them, but that His name shall not be dishonored before the enemies of truth and righteousness, that the satanic agencies may not triumph in their punishment and destruction. He has borne long with their waywardness and unbelief and folly. With wonderful forbearance and compassion He has disciplined them. If they will heed His instruction, He will cleanse away their perverse tendencies, saving them with an everlasting salvation and making them eternal monuments of the power of His grace” (Manuscript 51, 1901).

The Experience of Jeremiah

In expressing such great hope for God’s church, it is likely that some might think that we are going too far. However, Inspiration testifies again and again to the true position of spirit and attitude all should possess toward modern Israel. The experience of Jeremiah, in a special sense, reveals to us a test of faith concerning the final triumph of God’s church. Again, we are considering a prophet of God, called to present a message of revival and warning to the church.

As the situation became worse in Israel, and the messengers as well as the message were treated with scorn, God allowed His people to be taken captive into Babylon. While this was the fate of a nation that had been appointed to reveal God’s glory to the world, Jeremiah did not give up hope for Israel’s final restoration.

“Laying fast hold on the promises of God, Jeremiah, by means of an acted parable, illustrated before the inhabitants of the fated city his strong faith in the ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose for His people. In the presence of witnesses, and with careful observance of all necessary legal forms, he purchased for seventeen shekels of silver an ancestral field situated in the neighboring village of Anathoth.

“From every human point of view this purchase of land in territory already under the control of the Babylonians, appeared to be an act of folly. The prophet himself had been foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, the desolation of Judea, and the utter ruin of the kingdom. He had been prophesying a long period of captivity in faraway Babylon. Already advanced in years, he could never hope to receive personal benefit from the purchase he had made. However, his study of the prophecies that were recorded in the Scriptures had created within his heart a firm conviction that the Lord purposed to restore to the children of the captivity their ancient possession of the Land of Promise. With the eye of faith Jeremiah saw the exiles returning at the end of the years of affliction and reoccupying the land of their fathers. Through the purchase of the Anathoth estate he would do what he could to inspire others with the hope that brought so much comfort to his own heart” (Prophets and Kings, p. 469).

However, this position was not taken by Jeremiah without forethought and even some serious afterthought. It seems that conditions were so discouraging for God’s people that Jeremiah struggled with the confidence he had placed in his nation’s recovery.

“So discouraging was the outlook for Judah at the time of this extraordinary transaction that immediately after perfecting the details of the purchase and arranging for the preservation of the written records, the faith of Jeremiah, unshaken though it had been, was now sorely tried. Had he, in his endeavor to encourage Judah, acted presumptuously? In his desire to establish confidence in the promises of God’s word, had he given ground for false hope? Those who had entered into covenant relationship with God had long since scorned the provisions made in their behalf. Could the promises to the chosen nation ever meet with complete fulfillment?

“Perplexed in spirit, bowed down with sorrow over the sufferings of those who had refused to repent of their sins, the prophet appealed to God for further enlightenment concerning the divine purpose for mankind....

“Nebuchadnezzar’s armies were about to take the walls of Zion by storm. Thousands were perishing in a last desperate defense of the city. Many thousands more were dying of hunger and disease. The fate of Jerusalem was already sealed. The besieging towers of the enemy’s forces were already overlooking the walls. ‘Behold the mounts,’ the prophet continued in his prayer to God; ‘they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what Thou has spoken is come to pass; and, behold, Thou seest it. And Thou has said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.’ Jeremiah 32:24, 25.

“The prayer of the prophet was graciously answered. ‘The word of the Lord unto Jeremiah’ in that hour of distress, when the faith of the messenger of truth was being tried as by fire, was: ‘Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?’ Verses 26, 27. The city was soon to fall into the hand of the Chaldeans; its gates and palaces were to be set on fire and burned; but, notwithstanding the fact that destruction was imminent and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be carried away captive, nevertheless the eternal purpose of Jehovah for Israel was yet to be fulfilled. ...

“Thus was the church of God comforted in one of the darkest hours of her long conflict with the forces of evil. Satan had seemingly triumphed in his efforts to destroy Israel; but the Lord was overruling the events of the present, and during the years that were to follow, His people were to have opportunity to redeem the past” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 471-474).

Jeremiah wrestled and prayed with the decision he had made. He could not trust his senses or outward appearances. He must place full confidence in the restoration of Israel, for thus had the Lord spoken. He must put all of his weight firmly upon the promises of the word of God.

In the eyes of some, it might have appeared that Jeremiah was going too far, hoping against hope. The same may be thought today of our confidence in the eventual triumph of the remnant church, but we stand in good company. We would rather rest our faith in the sure word of God than in the opinions of men, no matter how learned or zealous they may appear to be. In these days of many winds and a thousand voices, it is difficult to really know who’s who. But when we turn to the examples and teachings of men we know to be prophets of God, we can be sure that all of Heaven is on our side.

7 - WHEN MY LIBERTY BECOMES SIN

A Lesson from the Experience of Paul

According to the Bible, that which is my right is not always what is best for me to do. Indeed, it is possible for me to sin by defending what is my legitimate right. In what sense is this so? If my conscience allows me to do a certain thing without condemnation, but to do so causes others to stumble with offense, then my liberty becomes sin. Why? Is it because the deed itself is sin? No, but because the deed causes offense to those whose consciences are more sensitive. Of course this principle has no application to moral issues of righteousness and sin. A conviction based on a command of God cannot be altered to avoid offense. But regarding matters that involve no such divine mandate, expediency is the highest principle, because the salvation of souls is the highest priority.

The apostle Paul clearly expounded this truth. Give careful consideration to his words:

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak....And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Corinthians 8:9, 11-13).

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth....Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God; even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:23, 24, 32, 33).

The context of these verses reveals that Paul is speaking with regard to the eating of meats offered to idols. Concerning this matter Paul clearly stated that it was not a moral issue: “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Corinthians 8:8). But there was a moral issue involved that Paul stressed: “If [the eating of] meat [offered to idols] make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Corinthians 8:13; words in brackets

supplied). To thus cause needless offense, over a personal right that could be sacrificed without violating the law of God, is “sin against the brethren” and “sin against Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:12).

In light of this Biblical principle, we can only conclude that God would have us sacrifice our amoral rights and practices that cause souls to stumble. We are called upon by Scripture to do all we can to avoid any offense that does not require a violation of our own conscience before God. My liberties and rights become sin when I seek to maintain them at the expense of souls.

In the very same context of the previously quoted Scriptures, Paul applies this principle to justify his choice to refuse tithe support. This counsel is timely. Notice the sound reasoning and pure motive revealed in the apostle’s position:

“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink?” (1 Corinthians 9:1-4). “Have we not the right to our food and drink [at the expense of the churches]?” (1 Corinthians 9:4, The Amplified Bible).

“[Consider this:] What soldier at any time serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of the fruit of it? Who tends a flock and does not partake of the milk of the flock?” (1 Corinthians 9:7, The Amplified Bible).

“He that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void” (1 Corinthians 9:10-15).

“If we have sown [the seed of] spiritual good among you, [is it too] much if we reap from your material benefits? If others share in this rightful claim upon you, do not we [have a still better and greater claim]? However, we have never exercised this right, but we endure everything rather than put a hindrance in the way [of the spread] of the good news (the Gospel) of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:11, 12, The Amplified Bible).

There is no question that Paul is here referring to tithe support. He begins by establishing that he is, indeed, called to preach the gospel and points to the souls he has won to Christ as the evidence of his calling. He then impresses on their minds the fact that He has the perfect right to receive his material support from those for whom he has labored in spiritual service, Those who preach the gospel have the right to live of the gospel, he says. And then he makes his point.

Nevertheless, even though he has the right to receive tithe, he chooses not to exercise this right. Why? Because he sees that to do so would “hinder the gospel of Christ.” He actually says, “it were better for me to die,” rather than accept tithe from the Corinthians and thus make void the higher glory of preaching the gospel.

One might question Paul’s reasoning. How could he actually believe that under certain circumstances accepting tithe may “hinder” the gospel? Surely Paul would agree that the more money a minister has, the greater will be his ability to win souls, wouldn’t he? No, Paul discerned the possibility of exerting a far greater influence for Christ among the Corinthians by taking a position to refuse their tithe. He seems to have understood human nature in such a way as to lead him to believe that the offense and strife involved in receiving tithe from the Corinthians would have been counter-productive to the gospel purpose.

It is also important for us to consider some of the circumstances which may have influenced Paul’s decision. The first fact which presents itself is that he took this position with regards to “the church of God” which was at “Corinth.” He addressed these believers as “them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Later in his letter, the apostle says that he had to speak to the Corinthians “as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1). He confronted them straightly, saying, “for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (Verse 3).

The church at Corinth was part of the “church of God.” Yet there were carnally-minded members in its fellowship. This was made evident by “envying, strife, and divisions: among church members. The church was in great need of a more personal encounter with Christ. None will question that this same situation exists in God’s church today, in its pre-triumphant status.

“Let every one who is seeking to live a Christian life, remember that the church militant is not the church triumphant. Those who are carnally minded will be found in the church. They are to be pitied more than blamed. The church is not to be judged as sustaining these characters, though they be found within her borders....It may be that in the church there are those who are cold, proud,

haughty, and unchristian, but you need not associate with this class. There are many who are warm-hearted, who are self-denying, self-sacrificing, who would, were it required, lay down their lives to save souls. Jesus saw the bad and the good in church relationship, and said, 'Let both grow together until the harvest.' None are under the necessity of becoming tares because every plant in the field is not wheat" (Fundamentals of Christian Education, pp. 294, 295).

Because of the low level of spirituality among the members of the church at Corinth, it was necessary for Paul to bear a "straight testimony" to them. Paul must so distinctly magnify the righteousness and love of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the Corinthians would be faced with the painful realization that they were "yet carnal." He would need to tell them the truth concerning themselves. The compassionate apostle well knew that it would be difficult for some to bear the revelation of Christ, and he desired to remove any obstacle that might be seized upon as an excuse to reject his message.

"Paul longed to speak to the church in Corinth of spiritual things. But to his sorrow he found it in great weakness. The church members could not even bear to hear the truth concerning themselves.... The spiritual growth of this people was so dwarfed that a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' was an offense to them. Paul knew that by giving them the truth he would be ranked as an accuser and faultfinder" (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1086).

It was consideration of the great spiritual needs of the people that led Paul to take a position of declining to receive tithe. Under such circumstances as these, the apostle wanted to make it clear that he did not work for money, but for souls. Inspiration comments on the integrity of Paul and makes it clear that he did not sacrifice principle in his refusal to accept tithe:

"Paul did not vacillate. He was established and grounded in the faith. But as far as possible he sought to make himself one with those for whom he labored.

"As a gospel minister, it was Paul's privilege to claim a support from those for whom he labored. But though he became the servant of all, yet he worked with his hands to support himself, that none might find occasion to charge him with selfishness. He did not receive wages for his labor, though as a minister of the gospel this was his right. Thus he made it evident that he was working for souls, not for money....

"Would that today men might be found with faith to do as Paul did, men who would preach the gospel, not looking to men for their reward, but willing to receive their reward in souls.

“We know that the apostle did not sacrifice one jot of principle. He did not allow himself to be led away by the sophistry and maxims of men” (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1088).

Thus Paul gave testimony that there are issues and truths of far greater importance than whether a ministry has the right to receive tithe money. If we allow ourselves or our acceptance of tithe to become the major matter of attention, the focus of many people will be diverted from the vital truths for this time to contend for their right to do as they choose with their tithe. In counter response many will become caught up in denying that individuals have any such right, and thus their attention as well will be shifted from those things that really matter. A major division will likely result. The church leadership may think it necessary to take action to disfellowship those who pursue a course to defend their right to receive the tithe of others. The excommunicated will cry, “persecution,” and claim that “the shaking” has occurred to divide the wheat and tares in the church. All this, over whether or not independent ministries have the right to receive tithe. Will the Lord be glorified in such a scenario?

As we have already pointed out, any movement that would divide the church prior to the Sunday law test is destined to failure and will only cause a needless loss of souls in the process. We may have the right to receive tithe, or to pay it wherever we please, but are we at liberty to divide the church over the issue? In matters that involve no violation of moral law, submission to the body of Christ is the highest principle.

With a spirit of cooperation and humility we can press together as a people and strive for revival and reformation in the church. If the acceptance of tithe by independent ministries is interpreted as wrong and divisive, then let us lay the issue aside and give no occasion for offense. Then, with an earnest spirit ablaze with the love of Christ, let us help to awaken and educate our people as fast and as far as possible in preparation for the real test that will finally separate the wheat and the tares. Then “the members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant” (Evangelism, p. 707).

We may urge that independent ministries have the right to receive tithe and that individual members of the church are at liberty to return their tithe wherever they choose. But in light of Paul’s instruction and example, the more important question is not whether we have the right to follow this course, but whether it is best to do so, and if such a course would “hinder the gospel.”

Reformers in Israel’s past consistently encouraged the rendering of financial support to God’s chosen nation, in spite of its sins. Nehemiah was one such reformer. (See Nehemiah 10:37-39; 13:1-12.) We have no record that he used the

apostasy of Israel to divert financial support to himself. Rather, he went about to correct the abuses of the temple so that the confidence of the people and their monetary support might be restored. Sister White followed the same course of action. She urges us to give no heed to messengers that are “taking the position that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon” and advocating “that we should not pay tithes” (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 58, 60).

Ellen White spoke out strongly against the abusive use of tithes, as did Nehemiah. At times she even appropriated the tithes of individuals, as well as her own, to denominational workers or their families who were being neglected. (See Spaulding-Magan Collection, pp. 117, 215, 216). In another circumstance she spoke of many ministers who did not “feed” the people and through whom the “standard of the gospel ministry is lowered into the dust.” Also mentioned were “the elders of our churches” who, with the ministers, had “not all been as branches of the Living Vine, drawing nourishment from Christ; they are not rich in spiritual knowledge and heavenly wisdom, but are dry and Christless. The words they speak in the desk may be good in themselves, but they are powerless because the heart of the speaker is not transformed by grace. The churches would do far better without such elders and ministers.

“Money is drawn from the Lord’s treasury to support those who are unconverted, and need that one teach them the first principles of the gospel, which is Christ formed within, the hope of glory” (Series A, no. 1, pp. 24, 25).

In the context of this quotation the prophet of God does not encourage us to stop supporting the church because of these abuses. While she went to work to correct this evil, she encouraged the people, as did Nehemiah, not to neglect their duty to financially support the church.

“You who have been withholding your means from the cause of God, read the book of Malachi, and see what is spoken there in regard to tithes and offerings. Cannot you see that it is not best under any circumstances to withhold your tithes and offerings because you are not in harmony with everything your brethren do? The tithes and offerings are not the property of any man, but are to be used in doing a certain work for God. Unworthy ministers may receive some of the means thus raised, but dare any one, because of this, withhold from the treasury, and brave the curse of God? I dare not. I pay my tithes gladly and freely, saying, as did David, ‘Of thine own have we given thee.’ A selfish withholding from God will tend to poverty in our own souls. Act your part, my brethren and sisters. God loves you, and He stands at the helm. If the Conference business is not managed according to the order of the Lord, that is the sin of the erring ones. The Lord will not hold you responsible for it, if you do what you can to correct the evil. But do not commit

sin yourselves by withholding from God His own property. 'Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently,' or deceitfully.

"When persons declare that they will not pay their tithes because the means are not used as they think they ought to be, will the elder of the church or the minister sympathize with the sinners? Will he aid the enemy in his work? Or will he, as a wise man, endued with knowledge, go to work to correct the evil and thus remove the stumbling-block? But, brethren, do not be unfaithful in your lot. Stand in your place. Do not, by your neglect of duty, increase our financial difficulties" (Series A, no. 1, pp. 27, 28).

We may have an accurate record of all the sins and abuses of the church and use such as evidence that they do not deserve our support, but is this in accordance with all the counsel of God? If we are to identify with the weaknesses and failures of the church and maintain a humble recognition that we, not they, have sinned, then we cannot set ourselves up as superior to the church by claiming, in essence, that we are worthy of the tithe but they are not.

As we examine the Spirit of Prophecy regarding the disposition of tithe by church members, we can only conclude that God's first will is that we return our tithes to the organized church ministry. This is the general rule expressed throughout Inspiration. The very latest counsel given on the subject by Ellen White was written in 1911, just four years before her death. Note what she said:

"You ask if I will accept tithe from you and use it in the cause of God where most needed. In reply, I will say that I shall not refuse to do this, but at the same time I will tell you that there is a better way.

"It is better to put confidence in the ministers of the conference where you live, and in the officers of the church where you worship. Draw nigh to your brethren. Love them with a true heart fervently, and encourage them to bear their responsibilities in the fear of God. 'Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity in spirit, in faith, in purity' (1 Timothy 4:12" (Manuscript Releases, vol. 1, p. 196).

The spirit and wisdom of Christ shines through very clear and beautiful in this statement. Even under circumstances where individuals were reluctant to do so, Ellen White counseled that it would be "better" for them to return their tithe through the local church and conference channel. She was careful not to dictate where the tithe must be returned, but she did not hesitate to point out "the better way" to return tithe. Any deliberate effort to divert tithe from the church or to encourage people to return their tithe to any other entity or person would be a clear violation of this counsel. When an independent ministry publishes books and

produces tapes that encourage people to send them their tithes, they are pursuing a course for which there is no inspired backing. Even if a ministry takes a position to accept tithes but not solicit them, a total submission to the Spirit of Prophecy will require that ministry to actively encourage their supporters to choose what God's prophet called the "better way."

The following inspired counsel should be carefully considered in this context:

"We should all feel our individual responsibility as members of the visible church and workers in the vineyard of the Lord....

"God is leading out a people to stand in perfect unity upon the platform of eternal truth. Christ gave Himself to the world that He might 'purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' This refining process is designed to purge the church from all unrighteousness and the spirit of discord and contention, that they may build up instead of tear down, and concentrate their energies on the great work before them. God designs that His people should all come into the unity of the faith....

"Many do not realize the sacredness of church relationship and are loath to submit to restraint and discipline. Their course of action shows that they exalt their own judgment above that of the united church, and they are not careful to guard themselves lest they encourage a spirit of opposition to its voice. Those who hold responsible positions in the church may have faults in common with other people and may err in their decisions; but notwithstanding this, the church of Christ on earth has given to them an authority that cannot be lightly esteemed....

"Church relationship is not to be lightly canceled; yet when the path of some professed followers of Christ is crossed, or when their voice has not the controlling influence which they think it deserves, they will threaten to leave the church. True, in leaving the church they would themselves be the greatest sufferers; for in withdrawing beyond the pale of its influence they subject themselves to the full temptations of the world.

"Every believer should be wholehearted in his attachment to the church. Its prosperity should be his first interest, and unless he feels under sacred obligations to make his connection with the church a benefit to it in preference to himself, it can do far better without him.

"If the world sees a perfect harmony existing in the church of God, it will be a powerful evidence to them in favor of the Christian religion. Dissensions, unhappy differences, and petty church trials dishonor our Redeemer. All these may be avoided if self is surrendered to God and the followers of Jesus obey the voice of

the church. Unbelief suggests that individual independence increases our importance, that it is weak to yield our own ideas of what is right and proper to the verdict of the church; but to yield to such feelings and views is unsafe and will bring us into anarchy and confusion. Christ saw that unity and Christian fellowship were necessary to the cause of God, therefore He enjoined it upon His disciples. And the history of Christianity from that time until now proves conclusively that in union only is there strength. Let individual judgment submit to the authority of the church” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 16-19).

“Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man being independent.... If men will not move in concert in the great grand work for this time, there will be confusion. It is not a good sign when men refuse to unite with their brethren and prefer to act alone. Let laborers take into their confidence the brethren who are free to point out every departure from right principles. If men wear the yoke of Christ, they cannot pull apart; they will draw with Christ” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 258).

Without question we are living in a time of “great perplexity and confusion” on many issues (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 80). Lines are blurred in many minds. “What should we do?” is the heart-felt cry of many in Israel. It seems that Wisdom would urge us at this time to be exceedingly careful to adhere to the plainest statements of Inspiration. It is better to be safe than sorry when dealing in matters of eternal consequence. When you doubt, don’t. Do not take unclear or non-specific quotations to draw a conclusion when there are plain statements that cannot be misunderstood. When you are unsure about a matter, move to the side of unquestionable right. Then you will be sure of where you stand and stand without question.

8 - PHARISEES, SADDUCEES, OR JESUS?

Who are We Following?

In the time of Christ there were two major sects of Jews. The Pharisees were the more conservative, superficial class. Their primary theological focus was the law of God. They multiplied and urged outward forms and demanded the execution of justice. The Sadducees were the more liberal, politically influential class. Their theological emphasis led them to live for the present with little or no thought of the future. A compromising diplomacy characterized their class. These two categories of religious people represent two extremes in human nature that have ever been present in the world.

Because of the differences in their theological focus, the Pharisees and Sadducees were bitter enemies and continually sought to diminish one another's influence with the people. But while they opposed one another and magnified their differences before the people, they had one thing in common. They were of the same spirit, controlled by the same motives and infected with the same desire for self-exaltation and control.

Amid this state of strange divided unity, the Lord Jesus appeared upon the scene with a spirit and motive entirely distinct from that which prompted these two classes. He came seeking to ally Himself with neither class but invited all to follow Him. He sought no influence for Himself or for which He would be required to strive, but gained an influence which was freely given Him from the hearts of those who knew His words were truth. He emphasized neither justice nor mercy, but revealed the perfect balance of the two. Often He forgave those whom men condemned, and reproved those whom men had thought just. To the Pharisees He appeared liberal and lawless. To the Sadducees He seemed far too conservative to be anything less than foolish. In reality, He was the perfect expression of balance – the personified character of God. It was this that attracted the masses to Him. It was the harmony of justice and mercy, the blend of grace and truth, the balance of law and love that gave Him influence with the people.

While the Pharisees hated the liberal focus of the Sadducees, and the Sadducees detested the conservative emphasis of the Pharisees, each class unitedly despised the balance of Christ, which condemned them both. It was upon this common ground that the Pharisees and Sadducees confederated to oppose Christ and His followers. To the natural heart, whether conservative or liberal, balance appears to be threatening. In uniting to crucify Christ, the Pharisees and Sadducees revealed that they were really one company with one purpose, though they knew it not.

“Inspiration speaks of the mutual spirit of these two groups and points out the factor that determined their unity:

“The two sects had been at bitter enmity. The Sadducees courted the favor of the ruling power in order to maintain their own position and authority. The Pharisees, on the other hand, fostered the popular hatred against the Romans, longing for the time when they could throw off the yoke of the conqueror. But Pharisee and Sadducee now united against Christ. Like seeks like; and evil, wherever it exists, leagues with evil for the destruction of the good” (The Desire of Ages, p. 405).

As the influence of Christ increased among the people, the Pharisees and Sadducees panicked at the prospect of what might be the result to themselves if He were allowed to continue teaching. They determined to join forces and destroy Christ rather than yield up their control over the people.

The revelation of the character of God serves to reveal the sameness of spirit that governs both conservatives and liberals who are not under the governing influence of the Spirit of Christ. Thus it is seen that all who are right in their own eyes, zealous to defend their rights and push their views while failing to truly love like Jesus loves, are really serving the same master, though on the surface they appear at odds. When Christ is revealed, the deeper motives of every heart are made manifest.

Inspiration prophesies of only two groups to finally develop in the church in these last days. Carefully consider this statement:

“Divisions will come in the church. Two parties will be developed. The wheat and tares grow up together for the harvest.

“The work will grow deeper and become more earnest to the very close of time. And all who are laborers together with God will contend most earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. They will not be turned from the present message, which is already lightening the earth with its glory. Nothing is worth contending for but the glory of God” (Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 114).

Even now, as in the days of Christ, there are only two spirits prompting men and women. As the end draws nearer and nearer, each member of the church militant will reveal the spirit that prompts them. Issues will arise, opportunities for compromise will present themselves and tests of faith and patience will occur to require decisions and reveal character. “As we near the judgment, all will manifest their true character, and it will be made plain to what company they belong”

(Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 100). Time, trial, and circumstance will eventually reveal only two classes: those who love God with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves, and those who love themselves and are merely seeking a position or a following among men. All who have the Spirit of Christ will unite on the platform of truth, while those who are at heart opposed to righteousness will unite to persecute Christ in the person of His true followers.

Those who are truly following Christ will learn to stand in Him alone. They will seek the approval of God, not of men, and will thus find themselves in harmony with all who seek the same. They will hate none and love all, discerning when to reprove and when to forgive, when to speak and when to be silent. They will agree with the truth spoken by every man, whether conservative or liberal, and will direct the attention of all to Christ and His word. They will not exalt themselves and praise men for their accomplishments. Their voices will not be heard pronouncing judgment on others and declaring themselves to be the answer. They will not magnify issues that have no bearing on salvation, nor will they be involved in contending for their own rights. For them, “nothing will be worth contending for but the glory of God.”

“As trials thicken around us, both separation and unity will be seen in our ranks. Some who are now ready to take up weapons of warfare will in times of real peril make it manifest that they have not built upon the solid rock; they will yield to temptation. Those who have had great light and precious privileges, but have not improved them, will, under one pretext or another, go out from us. Not having received the love of the truth they will be taken in the delusions of the enemy; they will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, and will depart from the faith. But, on the other hand, when the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd’s voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd. The people of God will draw together and present to the enemy a united front. In view of the common peril, strife for supremacy will cease; there will be no disputing as to who shall be accounted greatest. No one of the true believers will say: ‘I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas.’ The testimony of one and all will be: ‘I cleave unto Christ’ I rejoice in Him as my personal Saviour.’

“Thus will the truth be brought into practical life, and thus will be answered the prayer of Christ, uttered just before His humiliation and death: ‘That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou has sent Me.’ John 17:21. The love of Christ, the love of our brethren, will testify to the world that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. Then will the message of the third angel swell to a loud

cry, and the whole earth will be lightened with the glory of the Lord” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 400, 401).

Notice the sequence of events that are given in this inspired quotation. First it speaks about the present time, a time when both separation and unity are seen in our ranks. Then it reveals that when the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, when the Sunday law test confronts the church militant, the people of God will draw together. It says that they will present to the world a united front and thus will be answered the prayer of Christ in John 17. Then will the loud cry of the third angel fill the whole earth with its glory.

“The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 117)

Seventh-day Adventism is destined to triumph with every member who proves faithful. The trials among us will reveal whether we are possessed of a spirit to accuse and condemn or to heal and restore. Though now the conservatives and liberals appear at war, finally the tares among both classes will unite to oppose God’s true and faithful people, while the true-hearted draw together and present to the enemy a united front.

Where do you stand, fellow believer in Christ? Are you scattering with those who scatter, or are you pressing together with those who are putting forth self-denying efforts to seek and save the lost? Are you disputing over who’s right and who’s wrong, or are you striving to present to the enemy a united front? Surely these are questions worth asking, for only when the love of Christ overcomes the “we versus they” attitude in our hearts will the world believe that we are indeed His disciples. Only when we love one another as Christ has loved us will the earth be lightened with the glory of the Lord.

Pharisees, Sadducees, or Jesus? With whom will you stand?

9 - THE GREATEST NEED OF THE CHURCH

A Revival of True Godliness

Here we are, living in this dark world of suffering and sin, well over one hundred years beyond the divine intent. The mocking reality of our failure to hasten the glorious coming of Jesus threatens to steal away our confidence that God will yet purify His church and lead her on to victory at last. The passage of time tempts us to doubt the special identity we claim as a people and seems to belie the whole idea of a remnant church. And yet, we hold on and hope, for we know in our inmost souls that we have believed the truth and not a lie. But our hearts cannot be satisfied merely to hope. We cannot help but wonder what delays our Lord's glorious advent. The promise of God to the remnant church of eventual triumph is so certain that we cannot help but pursue an understanding of how it will happen. We sense that there must be something that yet eludes the grasp of our understanding. What will make the difference? What is our great need as a people? What will be the determining factor to transform the church militant into the church triumphant and usher in the long-awaited return of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? Here we are ...

There is a voice, an inspired, prophetic voice, that cries out in the wilderness of our wonder. A bright light illumines our pathway, if we will but open our eyes and extend our faith to see and believe what it reveals. There is no need for guessing, neither is there reason for confusion and doubt. While the dragon is wroth with the woman, she is supplied with the Spirit of Prophecy to guide her in every vital matter. There is an inspired answer to our dilemma. There is but one solution to the stalemate of Adventism, just one.

Carefully review the following statement and then we will break down the divine formula it prescribes:

“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing” (Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 121).

The spiritual experience of revival is a blessing only God can give. We cannot of ourselves create a true revival. But we can “seek” the revival God offers in His

appointed way. According to the above statement, we are called upon to seek the revival our Lord longs to give by engaging our hearts in an experience of “confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer.”

Some feel confident that the great need of our people is to hear proclaimed loud and long the failures, sins, and apostasies in the church. They seem certain that such an approach will one day succeed in arousing enough people to “stand up” and demand repentance or require a revival. The idea is gaining ground today that “the straight testimony” is equivalent to exposing error and sin. The more blunt and cutting the unclinking of evil, the more “straight” the testimony is thought to be. Men are being praised as messengers of truth for “telling it [whatever it may be] like it is and letting the chips fall where they may.”

Ellen White defined the straight testimony as follows:

“I asked the meaning of the shaking I had seen, and was shown that it would be caused by the straight testimony called forth by the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans. This will have its effect upon the heart of the receiver, and will lead him to exalt the standard and pour forth the straight truth. Some will not bear this straight testimony. They will rise up against it, and this will cause a shaking among God’s people” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 181).

The True Witness is Jesus Christ. The counsel or straight testimony that He gives is the Laodicean message. Those who receive His counsel are said to “exalt the standard” of righteousness and “pour forth the straight truth.”

It seems that the line is becoming blurred today between what it means to preach “the truth” in contrast to preaching things that are merely “true.” It is assumed that if a man exposes the various errors and sins of the church, he has preached “the straight truth.” But just because something is “true” doesn’t necessarily mean it is “the truth.”

Here are a few quotations that clearly define what “the truth” is:

“There are many precious truths contained in the Word of God, but it is ‘present truth’ that the flock needs now. I have seen the danger of the messengers running off from the important points of present truth, to dwell upon subjects that are not calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul. Satan will here take every possible advantage to injure the cause.

“But such subjects as the sanctuary, in connection with the 2300 days, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, are perfectly calculated to explain the past Advent movement and show what our present position is, establish the

faith of the doubting, and give certainty to the glorious future. These, I have frequently seen, were the principal subjects on which the messengers should dwell” (Early Writings, p. 63).

“You need plainly to define to the churches the matter of faith and entire dependence upon the righteousness of Christ. In your talks and prayers there has been so little dwelling upon Christ, His matchless love, His great sacrifice made in our behalf, that Satan has nearly eclipsed the views we should have and must have of Jesus Christ. We must trust less in human beings for spiritual help and more, far more, in approaching Jesus Christ as our Redeemer. We may dwell with a determined purpose on the heavenly attributes of Jesus Christ; we may talk of his love, we may tell and sing of His mercies, we may make Him our own personal Saviour

“I address the ministers. Lead the people along step by step, dwelling upon Christ’s efficiency until, by a living faith, they see Jesus as He is – see Him in His fullness, a sin-pardoning Saviour, One who can pardon all our transgressions. It is by beholding that we become changed into His likeness. This is present truth. We have talked the law. This is right. But we have only casually lifted up Christ as the sin-pardoning Saviour....

“Here is the work of the ministers of Christ. Because this work has not been done, because Christ and His character, His words and His work have not been brought before the people, the religious state of the churches testifies against their teachers. The churches are ready to die because little of Christ is presented. They have not spiritual life and spiritual discernment” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 8, pp. 271-273).

“We thank the Lord with all the heart that we have precious light to present before the people, and we rejoice that we have a message for this time which is present truth. The tidings that Christ is our righteousness has brought relief to many, many souls, and God says to His people, ‘Go forward’” (Evangelism, p. 192).

“Our churches are dying for want of teaching on the subject of righteousness by faith in Christ, and on kindred truths” (Gospel Workers, p. 301).

Preaching about the errors and apostasies of weak, fallen human beings in no way constitutes “the straight truth,” or “present truth,” or “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Yes, it is “true” that men sin and apostatize, but this is not the gospel. Preaching such things will no doubt cause a shaking, but it will never bring about a “revival of true godliness.” Our people need understanding, more than condemnation.

“The churches need education more than censure. Instead of blaming them too severely for their want of spirituality and neglect of duty, the minister should, by precepts and example, teach them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 269).

During the 1888 General Conference session, one man was preaching upon “the great wickedness and corruption in our midst and dwelling upon the apostasies among us.” Sister White called this a “gloomy discourse.” (See 1888 Materials, vol. 1, pp. 67, 68.)

The primitive godliness of the apostolic Christian church is described by Inspiration with such language as this:

“After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their one desire was the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth’s sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts. Such a love the believers were ever to cherish” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 547).

“Warm, inspired personal appeals were made to the erring, to the outcast, and to those who, while professing to know the truth, were lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 580).

It wasn’t long before this beautiful spirit was lost. Satan was successful in his deceptive efforts to destroy the experience of primitive godliness that distinguished the early church. It should be of great interest to every Seventh-day Adventist to understand how the devil was able to accomplish this evil work. Praise God, we are not left to wonder or guess. Notice what Inspiration says:

“Gradually a change came. The believers began to look for defects in others. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and His love. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith. In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors. They lost the brotherly love that Christ enjoined, and, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives and that, having shut the love of God out of their hearts, they would soon walk in darkness....

“It is not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers that works their most grievous disaster and most surely retards the progress of God’s cause. There is no surer way of weakening spirituality than by cherishing envy, suspicion, faultfinding, and evil surmising” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 548, 549).

There is no question that we are working against the possibility of a true revival if we are leading people to feed upon the errors, sins, and apostasies of others. According to Inspiration, this is the most effective way to weaken the spirituality of our people. Never forget, “the very act of looking for evil in others develops evil in those who look” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 492). If the messages we preach merely lead our hearers to see the sins and failings of others, then we are really preaching “peace and safety,” not “the straight testimony.” The sinner is always made more comfortable in his sins when he looks upon the sins of others. Such a focus will make a person immune to personal repentance. On the other hand, if

we preach and talk of Christ and His righteousness, magnifying the beauty of His character, then we are promoting “the straight testimony.” Inspiration says, “this is present truth.” Perhaps we could call it, “the straighter testimony.”

Inspiration encourages a different and more effective approach than that of condemning wrong. Those who feel a burden to expose error and sin would do well to seriously consider this inspired counsel:

“The Lord wants His people to follow other methods than that of condemning wrong, even though the condemnation be just. He wants us to do something more than to hurl at our adversaries charges that only drive them further from the truth. The work which Christ came to do in our world was not to erect barriers and constantly thrust upon the people the fact that they were wrong.

“He who expects to enlighten a deceived people must come near to them and labor for them in love. He must become a center of holy influence” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 121, 122).

“We are not to hurl the thunderbolts against the church of Christ militant; for Satan is doing all he possibly can in this line, and you who claim to be the remnant of the people of God had better not be found helping him, denouncing, accusing, and condemning. Seek to restore, not to tear down, discourage, and destroy” (Review and Herald, vol. 6, p. 516).

“The way to dispel darkness is to admit light. The best way to deal with error is to present truth. It is the revelation of God’s love that makes manifest the deformity and sin of the heart centered in self” (The Desire of Ages, p. 498).

Yes, revival is our greatest need as a people; and true, enlightened repentance is the basic condition upon which the reviving influence of the Holy Spirit will be granted. But the human heart is not led to repentance by condemnation, even if the condemnation be just. In fact, every effort to denounce and demand only drives the sinner into a more stubborn rebellion. True repentance is a gift from God, given only through a knowledge of His goodness – His pardoning mercy and restoring love. (See Romans 2:4.) Only the heart that has fallen in love with Jesus is capable of repentance. Herein lies the secret of true revival and reformation in the church. The Lord Jesus Christ, in all His matchless beauty, must be uplifted before our people. Drawing all eyes to Him, repentance becomes possible. Fixing the attention and riveting the affections upon the crucified, risen, and interceding Saviour, we will be motivated to turn from sin to righteousness with a willing heart. To suppose that people will be led to repentance by constantly thrusting upon them the fact that they are wrong is not only “bad psychology,” but it also serves to make repentance more difficult, and perhaps impossible for some.

The Laodicean message presents a balanced approach to a people in need of repentance. It gives an accurate diagnosis of our condition as a church and offers the prescribed medicine for our restoration. Consider the following amplification of the Laodicean Message (excuse our liberty):

“Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans [the church of judgment and vindication] write; these things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the

beginning of the creation of God [Jesus Christ]; I know thy works [I am perfectly aware of the superficial quality of your religious service], that thou art neither cold [blatantly evil] nor hot [wholehearted and fully consecrated]: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm [you are religious without really knowing God; intellectually converted but spiritually unregenerated], and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth [your spiritual condition nauseates me to the point of vomiting]. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods [I am wealthy in material status and spiritual heritage], and have need of nothing [I have the truth; I am the remnant church]; and knowest not [you are unaware of the fact] that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked [you are really not what you think you are; you do not discern your true spiritual poverty]: I counsel thee to buy of Me [exchange what you think you have for] gold tried in the fire [faith proved genuine by love], that thou mayest be rich [in true spiritual experience]; and white raiment [the spotless righteousness of Christ], that thou mayest be clothed [made righteous], that the shame of thy nakedness [your want of true righteousness] do not appear; and anoint thine eyes [of understanding] with eyesalve [the discernment of the Holy Spirit], that thou mayest see [your true condition and need]. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten [I'm telling you these things because I love you, not to hurt you]: be zealous therefore [in light of My love for you], and repent [turn from your sins individually and as a people]. Behold [perceive My pleading], I stand at the door [of your heart], and knock [I'm speaking to your conscience]: if any man hear My [pleading] voice, and open the door [of his understanding], I will [eagerly] come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me [we will truly communicate with one another and become friends]. To him that overcometh [the lukewarm condition] will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne [you will occupy the most exalted and privileged position in the universe]" (Revelation 3:14-21).

This message is so honest and full of hope. And it must be, for it is the counsel of Christ to the very last church of earth's history. She is therefore named according to God's purpose for her. Laodicea means a people judged and vindicated. This church occupies a unique position in both time and calling. She is the church to exist during the time of final judgment; and her destination is one of vindication. (This is not to be misunderstood to mean that those who remain in the lukewarm condition and fail to repent will be saved.)

In raising up churches through the succession of ages, God has had but one eventual purpose in view. Inspiration states this purpose with telling insight:

"From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities

and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9).

Here is revealed the eternal purpose of God for the church, and also the sure promise that "eventually" the universe will behold the final and full display of divine glory and love through the church. The Bible testifies that Laodicea is the final church to exist in the great controversy. The Spirit of Prophecy just as clearly states that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the church that occupies the historic position of Laodicea. It is therefore conclusive that the final and full display of the glory and love of God is eventually to be revealed through the Seventh-day Adventist Church. There is absolutely no inspired evidence that there will be another church to succeed Laodicea. She is destined to vindication and triumph with all who are found faithful to her message and mission. Those who fail to repent and refuse to avail themselves of the provisions offered for restoration, and choose to remain in the lukewarm condition, will be spewed out of the mouth of the Lord.

The present spiritual condition of the church is diagnosed by Jesus as very serious and potentially fatal if she does not repent. He pronounces her "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Yet she boasts that she is "rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing." She is filled with religious pride and self-righteousness. The fact that she is so blessed with an intellectual knowledge of truth and with temporal prosperity has created a rather puffy attitude of self-exaltation. She is inclined to parade her accomplishments and boast of her special identity as the remnant church. Moreover, she claims to be clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness.

In startling contrast to her high claims, the True Witness testifies that she is far from what she thinks she is. The most deceptive feature of her disease is that she does not see her true condition. Herein lies the seriousness of her spiritual sickness. As she looks upon herself, the appearance is rather impressive. In her own eyes she looks faithful and serving. In reality, pride and selfishness corrupt her good works. Her religious service is not pleasing to God. She tempts the Lord to vomit her up as nauseating. But rather than cast her off as a hopeless cause, He appeals to her conscience with tender compassion, saying, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." He says, "I love you," and demonstrates His love by giving an honest evaluation of her condition and offering the hope of spiritual restoration. He pleads for entrance into her heart, and to those who overcome He promises the most exalted position in all the universe, even a seat upon His throne.

The True Witness knows and loves us like no other. It is He who offers the only hope of the church. With eager longing He urges us to accept His proposal. Jesus says we need three vital things: (1) gold tried in the fire, which is the united powers of faith and love; (2) white raiment, which is the righteousness of Christ, both to pardon and empower; not produced by us, but given to us; (3) eyesalve, which is the discernment of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts, enabling us to see through

eyes enlightened with divine perception. The testimony of the True Witness to the Laodicean church is the glorious gospel of righteousness by faith. This is the great need of the church.

The True Witness offers faith that works by love. These are the cooperative influences that make it possible for the believer to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The Bible teaches that faith is the only acceptable and effectual response of man to God. Faith is the single means of obtaining the salvation and righteousness of God. Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. (See Hebrews 11:6; Romans 14:23.) But we are naturally inclined to seek the salvation and righteousness of God by carefully looking at the requirements of the law that condemns us and then proceeding to try real hard to measure up to its high standard. It is this approach to securing salvation that blinds the mind to the truth of Christ's righteousness and envelops the soul in a self-righteousness. The Laodicean condition is a direct result of focusing on the law and its requirements to the exclusion of Christ from our vision. He is never so far removed from our view as to be ignored or forgotten; He just takes second place in our emphasis, while we claim He is our all in all. We do not openly confess that we are depending on our good works and religious services for favor with God; indeed, we are not even conscious of the fact.

Salvation is not obtained "by works of righteousness that we have done" (Titus 3:5); it is not even obtained by faith and works. Salvation is received "by grace through faith" alone, "not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:8-10). In other words, salvation is not the product of good works, but good works are the product of salvation. The source of salvation is the grace of God, both to pardon and to empower. The means of securing salvation is faith. Faith is the only response that God accepts from man, and even his faith is a gift from God, implanted in the human heart without merit. The faith through which we are saved is not merely a passive, intellectual assent to truth, but rather, it is an aggressive principle that moves the human will in concert harmony with the revealed will of God. True faith works.

It is vital that we know how faith works – that is, how it is made active to accomplish its purpose. The Bible gives but one answer to this important question: "Faith...worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). That is, faith is awakened to action and aroused to its high purpose by God's love. This is why the True Witness offers the attractive influence of His love along with the gift of faith.

The apostle Paul expounds this principle even more clearly when he says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all,, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). God's love is the motivational force that causes faith to do those things that otherwise we would be totally unwilling and unable to do. Divine love is of such a power as to influence the naturally selfish human

heart to cease living for self and begin living for the One who revealed this love by dying for us. How, then, do we receive God's love and experience its power to mobilize our dormant faith?

God's love finds access to the human heart through the medium of perception or comprehension. Therefore Paul prays that we might "comprehend...the love of Christ...that we might be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18, 19). Divine love is a creative principle. It produces after its own likeness. When it enters into the heart through the channel of understanding, it gives birth to a like, responsive love that returns to God the life that was His already. We give nothing to God; we only return to Him that which He first gives us. Perceiving His love is the way by which we are made willing to yield to God all that we are and all that we have.

The cross of Christ is the perfect expression of God's love. Only as we understand the love and goodness of the Lord that Calvary proclaims will we be willing and able to turn from sin and truly repent. The only hope for Laodicea is such a revelation of Christ, so pure and penetrating, as will melt her selfish heart and cause her to live for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Efforts to repent; demands for repentance; increased awareness of the fact that we need to repent; all will avail us nothing, unless our eyes are directed to Christ. True revival is only possible through repentance; and repentance is only possible in the light of Calvary's love.

Dear friend, our final appeal is that you would confess that the need of the church is your own need as well. Pray in your inmost heart of hearts: Dear God, Your people are my people, Her sins are my own. We are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. "Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should not rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God" (Joel 2:17). We need Your love to motivate our faith, that we may be clothed with the beautiful righteousness of Christ. Please incline our hearts to know Your Son and the matchless attraction of His grace. Revive in our midst the spirit of brotherly love that characterized the primitive godliness of the apostolic church. Help us, dear God, to love as Jesus loves and not count men's sins against them. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17-19.) Grant us both courage and meekness to make warm, personal appeals to those within our sphere of influence. Give us the love of Moses, the intercession of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the deference and respect of David, the humility of Isaiah, the hope of Ezekiel, the faith of Jeremiah, and the wisdom and sacrificial spirit of Paul. May all of these attributes be combined in our experience that we may truly know of the "rebuke that is love, of the blow that wounds to heal, of the warning that speaks hope" (Education, pp. 89, 90). Let us reveal the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, who did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost. Amen.