

# THE RETURN OF THE LAMB<sup>1</sup>

By Paul Penno Jr.

May 30, 2015

## DEDICATION OF MARIO VERA

“And they brought unto Him also infants, that He would *touch* them: but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus *called* them unto Him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:15, 16).

I find it interesting that when parents brought their babies to Jesus, He touched them. Human touch and closeness conveys warmth, nurture, and love. When little ones sit on our laps they reach out to touch our hand.

Jesus sought to draw the little ones to Himself. Whenever Jesus touched someone it always conveyed His life-giving power. He often healed the sick with a touch. As the Creator He made Adam with His own hands from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Jesus has touched Mario and given His life to him.

While the disciples saw this as unbecoming of their Great Master Teacher and tried to keep the parents and children away, Jesus reversed their attempts and “called” these parents and children to Himself. Adults often interpose themselves between Jesus and the children. They hinder children from exercising the faith which God has given them to believe on Jesus their Saviour.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rev. 17:13, 14. 202, 206.

Jesus is calling Mario to Himself. Let's not hinder the bond which Jesus has with our little one. Let us encourage it.

## OUR PHOBIAS

It's not easy moving through the world when you're terrified of electricity. Donna, a writer, knows that better than most. Get her in the vicinity of an appliance or a light switch or a thunderstorm, and she is overcome by a terror so blinding she can think of nothing but fleeing. That, of course, is not always possible, so over time, Donna has come up with other answers. When she opens the refrigerator door, rubber-soled shoes are a must. If a light bulb blows, she will tolerate the dark until someone else changes it for her. Donna shops for clothes only when necessary, lest static on garments send her running from the store. And swimming at night is absolutely out of the question, lest underwater lights electrocute her. When there's a possibility that lightning may strike, she simply shuts off everything in her house and sits alone in a darkened room until the danger passes. Donna is afflicted with electro-phobia.

Now if you think she's nuts and plagued with an irrational fear, then consider this. Every human being on the face of this earth is afflicted with a suppressed terror of meeting God.

We are informed that at the coming of the Crucified One “the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains

and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:15, 16). To the saved ones, Jesus is the Lamb slain. To the lost, He is the avenging Lion of Judah. God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of the saved. The lost will howl with agony in that day. If you have thought that the Lord Himself is throwing these “rocks” down on them, it’s not true. They ask for it. All they need is to look into the eyes of the world’s Savior whom they have life-long despised and rejected, and they won’t need to be thrown into the Lake of Fire; they can’t wait to jump in.

Now what explains such odd human behavior when the lost are confronted with the Lamb? Of all the animals one could find on a farm, a lamb would be the most benign and docile. There are cows and horses, goats and rabbits, chickens and turkeys, dogs and cats. A lamb is not even the largest animal on the farm.

The only explanation for our human fear of God is our repressed, intense, animosity toward God. Our first parents exhibited this fear after the Fall when God paid them a visit. They cringed in fear. Sin had so riddled them with guilt that they could not bear to be in the presence of a holy, loving God. They preferred death themselves or the elimination of God rather than coexistence with Him. They were extremely uncomfortable around God.

A recluse lives in a secluded cabin in the remote wilderness. Do not approach the property because he will come out with a gun. The hermit posts a “no trespassing” sign on his property because he is

anti-social and can’t stand being around people. That’s the natural born state of humans with God.

In order for sin-laden humans to survive with such psychological trauma, we have adapted to our environment by suppressing the consciousness of God’s existence deep down inside. We have been deeply damaged with regard to our picture of God. We see the combination of the horrors of evil all around us as manifestations of God’s handiwork. We blame Him for everything bad that happens.

Is it any wonder that just thinking about a return visit of God to this earth gives us a psychological advent attack? We are ill-prepared for the second coming of Jesus. And there are gospel hucksters who unwittingly play to those human fears of His return visit.

How is it possible to herald to the world a message of “good news,” “be ye reconciled to God!” while misrepresenting Christ at His second coming as mowing down His helpless enemies with lethal radiation? Will God personally “devour the wicked” at Christ’s coming?

What is the true message which God wants conveyed to the world about His character? “The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love.”<sup>2</sup> To present Christ in His second coming as having lost His mercy and His love is misrepresentation due to sad misunderstanding.

What is involved is the presentation of the very gospel itself. Is it “good news”? Does it minister

---

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 415.

reconciliation? Not if it arouses fear and dread and plays upon an egocentric motivation.

“Does God kill or does sin kill?” We want to avoid any semblance of an Adventist version of Jonathan Edwards’s fire and brimstone preaching, convinced that the true motivation for lasting conversion is an appreciation of God’s love. We want to find a clearer grasp of what God’s love means for the world. This conviction enables us to “glory in the cross” as the true heart of “the third angel’s message in verity.” We view all of our “doctrines” in that light. Ellen White’s statement is suggestive, “It is not the fear of punishment . . . that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. . . . Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They . . . follow Him.”<sup>3</sup>

In a statement that is apparently timeless in application she says: “God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression.”<sup>4</sup> The statement does not say that God is not “an executioner”; that is left open. The point is that He does not “stand toward the sinner” in that capacity. He does not want to appear to the sinner as the “executioner,” and thus coerce by fear what He would will only by love.

Our soul-winning ministry is “toward” the alienated sinner. Our message is an evangelistic statement. The appeal is to the sinner’s heart to be reconciled to God.

Ellen White’s expression “the sentence against transgression” appears to refer to the warning in Genesis 2:17, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou

shalt surely die.” The last proclamation of the everlasting gospel must include that warning, which is consistent with God’s character of *agape*. God’s warning does not say, “In the day thou eatest thereof, I shall surely kill you.” Presenting Him “toward the sinner” as the “Executioner” who will carry out that sentence is not God’s soul-winning plan. God is not deceiving the unreconciled sinner with advertising cleverness. Rightly understood, even His wrath is an expression of His soul-winning love.

There are serious arguments that can be presented in support of the fear motivation. It is not wholly or necessarily negative; a perfectly healthy person with no neuroses will look both ways before crossing a busy street. It’s common sense. Nor can it be denied that throughout the 6000 plus years of human history God’s inspired servants have often employed fear as their motivation tool for inducing sinners to respond. The Old Testament prophets frequently speak of God destroying nations and people. There is no question that God sent the Flood to destroy sinners, also the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah, and destroyed the Egyptians at the Red Sea crossing.

The question that is of concern to us is what appeal will God use in that final “lighting of the earth with glory”? A “voice” will sound from heaven with unprecedented power, “Come out of [Babylon], My people.”

Will the motivation be associated with a uniquely clear revelation of the cross, what the Son of God accomplished there, and what it cost Him to save

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

<sup>4</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 36.

the world? Or will it be the quintessential appeal of fear inspired by the most terrorism-sounding message of all time? “The third angel’s message in verity” appears on the surface to be the latter.

Just when your weary, fearful heart is longing for some refreshing good news, then you bump into the most terrifying, blood-curdling news in the entire Bible: the third angel’s message (Rev. 14:9-11). Or so it seems on the surface. Utterly new in world history, it’s “the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation,” that is, not a shred of mercy mixed in with it. Always, the wrath of God has been mixed with mercy—a little hope or kindness included. Why this unprecedented horror?

Seriously, what human sin will be so bad that it merits such an apparent temper tantrum on the part of God?

And why do “the holy angels” and even “the Lamb” seem apparently to enjoy watching these unfortunate mark-of-the-beast people sizzle and roast in human agony? The third angel’s message says these lost souls “shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in [their] presence.” Understand it as figuratively as you like, it still seems to come through as unalloyed bad news. The worst part: our meek and lowly, precious Jesus seems to enjoy watching this horror “in [His] presence,” like the principals in the Spanish Inquisition dressing up their finest to watch the heretics burn alive in “their presence.”

And yet our favorite author tells us that “the third angel’s message in verity” is the “most precious”

Good News ever sounded—a clearer understanding of justification by faith—just what your fearful, weary heart hungers for. And just what the world is dying to hear!

Pharaoh’s hard heart helps to answer our dilemma regarding the last warning message to be given to the world. Did the Lord harden Pharaoh’s heart or did he harden it himself? The Bible actually says both. How you understand the problem depends entirely on the concept you have of the character of God.

Does God “harden” some people’s hearts so they cannot believe? Does He “fit” some people for “destruction”? Did He “harden Pharaoh’s heart”? There is a text in Romans that some think says so; and unless we understand it, we have a little nagging doubt hidden away in our hearts that is certain to confuse us and discourage us in some sudden moment of temptation.

Speaking of Pharaoh, Paul seems to say that he is an example of people God has “raised up” for the one purpose of destroying them. Our English Bible has misunderstood the Greek that Paul actually wrote: “Hath not the potter power over the clay . . . to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? . . . God . . . endured . . . the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction” (Rom. 9:21, 22). Surely sounds like He has “fitted” some people “for destruction”! Some read that and think of themselves as toys in God’s hands that He purposes to break and throw away.

They must not think that way. The key word translated as “fitted” is can be understood as “fitted

themselves for destruction.” According to everything else the Bible says about God’s character, that is the proper translation. Paul says that God has “endured with much longsuffering” this wearisome process that people put themselves through of fitting themselves for destruction. God created them and fitted them for eternal salvation, and He redeemed them; but by unbelief (disbelief) they have resisted His grace and perverted it. Like Pharaoh, the prime example, the more light God shed upon their pathway, the more they hardened their own heart.

There are ten Bible texts that say Pharaoh “hardened his own heart.” And there are ten that say “God hardened his heart.” Contradiction? No; it’s the metaphor of the clay: the more sunlight shines upon it, the harder it gets. Until we “let” the Holy Spirit give us a “new heart,” the more light the Lord shines upon us, the more we harden these poor sinful, selfish hearts.

And this is the key to our understanding Bible passages regarding the advent. If one has the legalistic, harsh, *ungospel* concept of God’s character, he will quote and emphasize Scripture that seems on the surface to support an angry God view. He will believe that God personally devours the wicked, that God destroys His enemies Himself personally, even vindictively with a righteous glee. He will even quote the words of the enemies of God to support this view.

For example, he will quote “For the great day of His *wrath* is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Revelation 6:17 and say, “See there! Christ is mad

when He comes the second time!” He won’t notice that these are the words of Christ’s enemies, whose basic sin has all their lives been that they have cherished this distorted view of His character. He will quote, “and He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God” Revelation 19:13, and imply that this “blood” is that of the lost, when in reality it is His own blood shed upon the cross. This is clear from the poignant disclosure of His sacrificial agony in verse 12, “His eyes were as a flame of fire” because His character is love. Love is the mightiest power in the universe: but when rejected, it brings the most fearful judgment possible. His name which no one knows but Him comes from the experience He went through on the cross, which no one, not even the angels in heaven, can fully appreciate. The idea is that the Lamb’s eyes are swollen with tears knowing the incomparable loss which the wicked are experiencing and He must give them up to their choice of rejecting Him their Saviour.

How will the lost feel when at last they actually see the face of Him whom they have persistently resisted and rejected? For those who have urged and supported the mark of the beast, just to look in His eyes will itself be torment “with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 14:9-11). The original language expresses the idea of their beholding in a flash the awful reality of their having rejected the One who suffered hell in order to save them. They can’t stand it. The horror of their final realization of guilt tortures every cell of their souls.

The Lord never intended that the sight of His loving face should do that to anyone. While it is true that “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), it is only to sin that the revelation of His love is so destructive. Thus, if a human being persistently clings to any sin as a vine clings to a tree, the physical sight of Him who is love incarnate must also be instant destruction.

“No,” says the legalist, “this is the blood of His enemies—now He’s going to get even with them.” They think they find proof for this in verse 15, the “sharp sword” that “goeth out of His mouth.” But figurative language must be explained by literal: in John 12:47, 48, Jesus makes clear that the “sharp sword” “out of His mouth” is His truth which the wicked already know well enough. There is nothing figurative about John 12:47, 28—“the word that I have spoken (not will speak), the same shall judge him in the last day.” According to *Great Controversy*, when Christ comes He doesn’t have a word to say in condemnation of the wicked. He has already spoken, throughout their lives, in tones of tender entreaty, and well they know and remember this. He plainly says the “word” “shall judge him.” A single word of truth from His lips slays them—but that has nothing to do with “lethal radiation.”

This is vital. To preach the love of God truly is not namby-pamby sentimentalism. It is hard reality. And it motivates truly all who choose to “believe.” And terribly hardens all who disbelieve.

Who slams the door in the face of the wicked when probation closes? Does God do it of His own initiative? I don’t see God pushing the door shut at

all; it looks to me like He has been propping it open for many decades. I see the wicked closing that door themselves. “If a man withdraws himself from light and evidence, and yields to Satan’s seducing arts, he himself draws the curtain of unbelief about him, so that light cannot be distinguished from darkness.”<sup>5</sup> Here is a clear statement: “God destroys no man. Every man who is destroyed will destroy himself.”<sup>6</sup> How desperately our youth need to get a clear picture of the character of God!

Sometimes it’s represented that the initiative in salvation or damnation as being backwards from what it is. The idea is that if you are saved, it will be due to your own initiative—you have done the right thing to make your salvation possible; and if you are lost, it will be due to God’s initiative. He pulls the rope. He is the hangman.

There is confusion—sometimes it is one way, sometimes it is another. But the basic idea that gets across to the student is that God has already done His part and is standing back with His arms folded, waiting for us to do our part. His attitude is, “Take it or leave it,” and by implication the sinner gets the idea that He could hardly care less if one does leave it. If God gets mad at the last, how does the sinner know He isn’t mad right now beneath the surface? There is no atonement, no reconciliation, in such a concept. Who would want to be in heart-union with such a God?

An example of the confusion in the minds of good Christian people regarding God’s character, is

---

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

found in Romans 2:5, 8, and 4:15 and 5:9. All Paul said in each instance was “wrath,” not specifying whose. “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself *wrath* against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and *wrath*” (Rom. 2:5, 8).

“Because the law worketh *wrath*: for where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). The “wrath” that Christ’s justification saves us from is “the wrath” which the law “worketh.” “The law worketh wrath,” imparting only a terror of judgment, but grace works a repentance that makes “old things” pass away; “behold, all things are become new” (Rom. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). Sin that was once loved is now hated, and righteousness that was once hated is now loved. “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). Such repentance is not only sorrow for sin and its results, but a genuine abhorrence of it. It produces an actual turning away from the sin. The law can never do this for anyone; the miracle is administered by grace.

“Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from *wrath* through Him” (Rom. 5:9). The “wrath” that the Lord wants to save us from is not “God’s wrath,” as some mistaken modern translations render Romans 5:9 (the original language says, “we shall be saved from wrath through Him”). God would save us from the terrible experience in the last judgment day of our own wrath, of hating ourselves for a lifetime of self-

seeking, wasted opportunities, and totally unjustified rebellion against His grace.

Paul understood the gospel. He also understood clearly the process of unconscious self-destruction that the wicked experience. He saw that their wrath, is against themselves, turned within, self-hatred. This is produced by “the law”. All such self-centered motivation produces despair and resentment by an eclipse of the sunlight of God’s true love. Rejoice, says Paul; we are delivered from this “wrath” through the gospel of Christ, “being now justified by His blood.” It is clear! Christ doesn’t have to stand between a bloodthirsty, angry God and a terrified sinner, and shield him from a divine monster!

Freeing the gospel from these confusing ideas makes it more effective, so that the beautiful “message of mercy (may) be given to the world . . . a revelation of His character of love.” This will be the “last rays of merciful light.”<sup>7</sup>

I believe in the reality of the “wrath of God.” But where does it come in? As I see it in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, God is not wrathful because men have rebelled against Him nor even because they crucified His Son. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” is His attitude toward that sin of mankind. His wrath will blaze forth when at the last the wicked attempt to exterminate God’s people! This is a willful, conscious re-crucifixion of Christ. The purpose of the second coming of Christ is that of a rescue operation, not a punishment

---

<sup>7</sup> *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 415.

expedition. The destruction of the wicked when they see His face is incidental.

The Son of God does not need to say a word to them. They look in His eyes (GC 666), and that is enough. “As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God.”<sup>8</sup>

No Fahrenheit or Centigrade heat could register the degree of pain that they will sense when “the word that He has spoken shall judge [condemn]” them in that “last day.” Will the functioning agent be the law, speaking thus? Yes, the wicked will painfully remember all their violations of the law. But what causes the law to come alive to them when for so long they have blacked it out? If looking in the eye of Christ arouses their pain at remembering what He “has spoken,” it must be the Holy Spirit who activates the law to make conviction become lethal.

In that “day,” will Christ be angry? There is no wrath in the universe as terrible as “the wrath of the Lamb.” He freely forgave those who crucified Him the first time; but when they attempt to “crucify Him afresh” in the person of His saints, His wrath will burst forth uninhibited. A healthy common sense today motivates every sane person to want to avoid that piercing eye of the Son of God when He

detects unforgiven rebellion cherished in the hearts of the resurrected unbelievers.

To “believe not” is more than passive, nonchalant unbelief. It requires the outlay of energy involved in rejecting evidence, in stifling conviction, in repeated choices to choose darkness in the face of almost blinding light. It involves rejecting “the heavenly gift” of the Holy Spirit of which one was once a “partaker,” and eschewing “the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:4, 5). It’s hard work which enlists one’s whole soul in rebellion against the *agape* which is God Himself. It’s not a selfish “wrath” that moves God; it’s total concern for the life of the universe. All infinity is therefore involved in that holy wrath, and the redeemed and the unfallen intelligences of the universe will be sharing in it by total agreement. God being infinite, His wrath will be infinite; but the universe will concur in its judgment.

The blazing hot intensity of that final divine wrath is almost unbelievable for us humans to contemplate. Its pent-up fires have been blazing quietly, unseen as in a dormant volcano. The incredible evil of torturing and murdering the Son of God, the constant beating off of the *agape*-motivated pleadings of the Holy Spirit, the blasphemous willingness to crucify the Son of God all over again in the person of His saints—beware that holy wrath when finally aroused.

That final divine wrath will be as fully *agape* as was the sacrifice of Christ. The final soul-winning message will convey to the heart of the sinner the profound realization that whatever suffering the lost

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 666.

will know has been already suffered in his behalf by the Son of God at His cross. Christ died for him; therefore Christ drank most fully of the “cup” that anyone can ever drink. When the sinner with an ounce of honesty in his soul can be brought to realize this, his heart is moved; he will be “drawn” all the way to repentance unless he “resists” that message of much more abounding grace.

The evangelistic message, “Be ye reconciled to God” could also include, “Be ye reconciled to the unanimous verdict of the redeemed and of the unfallen universe.” The “enmity against God” which has always characterized fallen human beings can be changed to reconciliation with God. Presenting to the sinner the truth of that final “wrath” will contribute to that soul-winning reconciliation.

How does the cleansing of the sanctuary relate to the final wrath of God? The cosmic Day of Atonement sees two antithetical movements develop side by side: hearts moved by the *agape* of the Lamb of God (the Hero of the Book of Revelation), becoming fully reconciled to Him; at the same time other hearts not so moved become implacably hostile to Him, seeking to attack Him in the person of His saints (the mark of the beast issue). The first must precede the second. The latter will trigger that fiercest divine wrath.

Doubtless the wicked who are resurrected would want to take their own resurrection-given-life. But they can't. Only one Person has ever been able to “lay down His [eternal] life” (as well as take it up again; John 15:13 speaks of this temporal, not eternal, life). We can cut short our temporal life by

suicide, but when the lost are resurrected “in Christ” they cannot on their own destroy that God restored life.

Only the Infinite Giver can do so; and when He does, it will be an act as distinctly *agape* as was His act of salvation which they have always despised.