

DAY OF ATONEMENT LIVING FOR JESUS

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A pastor is such not of volition, but it's like what happened to Paul when he said, "Necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" "If I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship" (1 Cor. 9:16, 17). When one is appointed to minister in the pulpit, his heart is burdened. It takes more than an hour or two to prepare a sermon—it takes a life (some pastors can retire and go into real estate; God bless them, let them be happy; others find that literally impossible).

I plead, I beg the Lord, "Convict me of what to preach," but I have not felt convicted to preach "against" TV, "against" dancing, "against" sports, or "against" any of the multitudinous idolatries of our "world." (If I start, there's no end.) I am constrained to proclaim something called the "Gospel," centering in something called "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). The Holy Spirit "pours the love [*agape*] of Christ" into empty TV-loving, sports-loving, idolatry-loving hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5)—*if, if*, they are willing to *let* Him do it, willing to "behold what manner of *agape* the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). It's all His volition, with our simple response like Abraham's when he said "Amen!" to God's fantastic promises (Gen. 15:6). The *agape* filled Abraham's heart. If it's true that "God is

agape" (1 John 4:8), how can we downgrade it? That's where the action is.

There's no need to rant "against" TV (yes, it's usually bad!), but John says that when the *agape* of the Father comes into one's heart "the love [*agape*] of the world" goes out (1 John 2:15, 16). One has to expel the other.

Someone rebukes me, "No, it's not that simple; you've got to go to work and force yourself by sheer iron will not to watch TV, or sports, or whatever your problem is that comes between you and Christ." But the problem is not the power of the temptation to "love the world," but the problem is frustrating the grace of God that teaches you to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts" as you "behold" Him "who gave Himself for us" (Titus 2:11-14). There we go again—back to the foot of that cross. That's where the action is.

Some wise person made a famous remark about spending a "thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ, especially its closing scenes." Busy as you are, don't think that watching a movie on the crucifixion will burn it all into you so you don't have to spend that "thoughtful hour." I challenge you—give the Holy Spirit that "hour" today. "Wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Ps. 27:14). You'll detest TV and sports foolishness for ever after.

The 1844 understanding of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary laid the foundation for the Seventh-day Adventist ideas of health reform and dress reform.

Israelites in ancient times drank alcoholic beverages throughout the year, although the Lord never approved of their doing so (cf. Lev. 10:1, 9; 1 Sam. 25:36), but on the annual day of atonement they didn't drink a drop. Now we are living in the serious time of the *antitypical* Day of Atonement. Hence, our stand on alcoholic drinks and drugs.

Likewise, there is clear evidence that the Israelites wore jewelry throughout the year, and this obvious fact impresses the jewelry advocates. But the Israelites wore none on their day of atonement.

They were free to try to become millionaires throughout the year, but on that day they abstained from work. There was a solid reason for these special sacrifices. It was "a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls" (Lev. 23:27). The only day in the year when the Israelites were required to fast was on that day of atonement. And they wore simple clothing, laying aside ornaments. On that solemn day the Israelites would leave all their business as they would on a Sabbath, gathering around the sanctuary as though they were facing their final hour of judgment. No one dressed up for a fashion show. It was a miniature sort of sand-box preview of the final cosmic judgment.

How does one "afflict" one's "soul"? Certainly not by self-flagellation or wearing hairshirts, or denying one's self necessary nutrition, or lazing around all the time! The meaning is to "abase" self (Isa. 31:4); to "chasten" self (Dan. 10:12); to "humble one's soul" (Psalm 35:13).

We can see this day of atonement experience in a number of Scriptures. In prophecy Christ associates His "fasting" with extremely simple clothing ("I made sackcloth also my garment," Psalm 69:10, 11; see also 35:13). In times of special spiritual concern, God's people both fasted and laid aside fancy clothes, wearing instead what is poorly translated as "sackcloth," a coarse material woven from goat's or camel's hair, dark in color. Wearing it was a sign of special repentance and serious paying attention to the Lord (cf. Gen. 36:34).

Ahab fasted and dressed in this way when he repented (1 Kings 21:27). God called for His priests or ministers to fast and wear humble clothing in times of special danger to Israel (Joel 1:13). Even the heathen knew what to do in times of special repentance, for the Ninevites "proclaimed a fast" and the king "laid his [gorgeous] robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes" when he heard the crisis preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:5-7).

Laying aside jewelry was specially required in times of unusual repentance or heart-searching, for at Mount Horeb the Lord told the Israelites, "Now put off thy ornaments from thee" (Ex. 33:4-6). The Hebrew text clearly means jewelry.

On the annual Day of Atonement the lifestyle of God's people was appropriate to the solemn faith that followed their high priest in his special work in the most holy apartment of the sanctuary. This was not due to cowardly self-centered fear, but a concern for the high priest himself, in whom the entire nation was incorporated. On that day alone,

he would come into the solemn presence of the Holy One of Israel, to be judged as the representative of the people of Israel. The people understood that if their high priest were to perish, the nation would perish.

It's easy to see why they were concerned. They laid aside all their day-to-day interests and concentrated on the success of *his* mission. We might say that they were more concerned for the plan of salvation *for the nation* than they were for their own *individual* salvation.

What's special about living in the *antitypical* Day of Atonement? Christ our High Priest is now cleansing the *heavenly* sanctuary. As the ancient Israelites had special duties in that *typical* service, so God's people around the world have special duties appropriate to this *antitypical* service. The correlation appeals to common sense. No one is so naïve as to think that since 1844 God requires total abstinence from food as the ancient Israelites practiced it in "type" for one day. The point is that today we don't make food an idolatrous "god" and live to enjoy sensuality. We practice reasonable health reform so we can keep our minds clear to appreciate the special solemn work our great heavenly High Priest is accomplishing because it's the most important activity going on in the universe. The Seventh-day Adventist health and dress reform message with its idea of world soul-winning mission grew out of this unique understanding of the heavenly Day of Atonement. It's not a fear trip or a works program. It's a growing concern for the mission of Christ.

Without food life could not be sustained; but of all periods of world history, our Saviour has singled out this post-1844 era as uniquely the time to "take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting [eating gourmet food or even too much good food], and drunkenness [the use of anything that lessens mental and physical alertness such as alcohol, drugs, tobacco], and cares of this life [keeping up with the world's materialism]" (Luke 21:34).

Now as never before is the time when we eat to live, not live to eat. The true motive in health reform is not trying to add a few more years so we can play golf, or to vacation a little longer. *It is living for the honor and glory of our Redeemer as He brings the great controversy with Satan to a triumphant victory.* We want to keep in tune with His special work, alert to the promptings of His Spirit, mentally, spiritually, and physically capable of cooperating with Him in His ministry for ourselves and for the world.

Does "ye shall do no manner of work" (Lev. 23:31) mean we mustn't hold a job during this antitypical Day of Atonement? Common sense says we have to work to make a living and support a family. But now our identity with Christ gives us something far more exciting to live for than worldly pleasure and acquiring things. "After all these things do the Gentiles seek" (Matt. 6:32).

What was permissible or normal in past history becomes out of date on the great Day of Atonement. In World War II, the nation's common "innocent" pursuits like pleasure driving gave way to

the priority needs of gasoline for the national emergency.

The Day of Atonement is a cosmic emergency. Adventist dress reform grew out of this concern for cooperation with the heavenly High Priest in His closing work of atonement. In a special sense, those who follow Christ by faith have their attention focused on Him, not on themselves. Their motivation again is not egocentric but a corporate concern for the final success of His mission. A clearer understanding of the cross and the Saviour's sacrifice delivers them from vanity. The miracle takes place: *self is crucified with Christ*. Then, wonder of wonders, they become *really* beautiful!

The glorious good news of it all is that never in world history have we had a better opportunity to find release from the painful, crippling tyranny of self. God's people in these last days are to be the most beautifully free from pride, sensuality, and materialism of any people of all time, and the most selfless humans the world has ever been refreshed to see, and therefore the happiest.

Their lifestyle is not a do-it-yourself works program of self-torture. It is a "sign" of an inner devotion to Christ and a preoccupation with Him that demonstrates they have found something more exciting to live for than adorning themselves or indulging sensual appetites. (Incidentally, Bible principles exclude something worse than wearing jewelry: the pious extreme of dressing in shabby, unattractive clothes that call attention to one's superior "relationship" with the Lord. That's another

ego trip. True dress reform requires both neatness and unobtrusive, sensible good taste).

Once we begin spending money for jewelry of any kind, there is no end to the burgeoning temptations to selfish extravagance. Jewelry is one of the biggest "impress-your-neighbors" rackets there is. It would be pathetic if we returned to the vain practice of proving our love for someone by that method. The Lord says that He considers that such "gold and silver is cankered," and in the judgment it will be a "witness" against us "and shall eat your flesh as it were fire" (James 5:3). The time is not far distant when we will be asked to give account of how we have spent every dollar on "self" rather than helping others hear the gospel. He would kindly save us from acute and painful embarrassment on that day.

Ellen White saw a connection between dress reform and the cleansing of the sanctuary. She was overjoyed to connect the Day of Atonement ministry with the special 1888 message of justification by faith (see her *Review and Herald* articles for the first four months of 1890). Her constant concern for the church was a "correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary [which] is the foundation of our faith." Professed believers must be able to "exercise the faith which is essential at this time, [and] occupy the position which God designs them to fill" (*Evangelism*, pp. 221, 222). This is why she said, "To dress plainly [that is, without drawing attention to ourselves], abstaining from display of jewelry and ornaments of every kind, is in keeping with our faith" (*Testimonies for*

the Church, vol. 3, p. 366). “Our faith” is unique in the world: it is following Christ in the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary.

Probably all of us here have had personal battles with the Holy Spirit’s call to health reform. It involves a decision to deny self in appetite. We pretty well know already what genuine health reform demands of us; our need is not so much more scientific corroboration of truths and principles that we have heard and known for years. Nutritionists and scientists are constantly filling the media with reports of new discoveries of the danger of too much fat in our diet, the dangers possible in the use of milk and dairy products (these dangers hover over us constantly), the evil of too much sugar in our diet, of eating flesh food, the danger in drinking coffee and the caffeine in soft drinks (to say nothing of the extra sugar we consume thereby). Is it really more scientific charts and statistics and warnings that we need?

If we knew for sure that the final events and the coming of the Lord were as near today as Jones, Waggoner, and Ellen White believed they all were in 1893, would we sense the constraint of the “love [*agape*] of Christ” to deny self and accept from Jesus the blessedness of victory over indulgence of perverted appetite?

Let us make clear what is the contribution that the actual, original 1888 message makes to health reform. “The Lord in His great mercy sent it,” to strengthen the doctrine of health reform among Seventh-day Adventists today. (The 1888 message restores the joy of surrender to Him as our Lord.)

The 1888 message on health reform does not torment us with greater fear or guilt. But it encourages us with that much more abounding grace that motivates us to be reconciled to our Lord and to His truth. In that experience of reconciliation with Him we find the blessed motivation to deny self *gladly* and *live* the health reform message because we find that self-denial is a joy “in Christ.” It’s beyond the “burden” experience.

This is accomplished by a simple but powerful “health reform” truth that is seldom comprehended among us as a people: The self-denying death that Jesus died on His cross is not the kind of death that the popular Sunday-keeping Evangelical churches assume that it was. The gospel is far greater Good News than they are capable of seeing! *Jesus died the second death of the entire world.*

Not until the sinner can grasp that holy truth can he sense the “power” that is in what Paul calls “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:4, 15). It’s the power of God unto salvation that Paul describes in Romans 1:16. Lukewarmness in practicing health reform is that which Jesus describes in Revelation 3:14-21 as what makes Him so sick at His stomach that He feels like throwing up. We can wear a cross around our necks and decorate our churches with its symbol and still appreciate nothing of what happened on Christ’s cross.

Paul begs us, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). If we are, as Christ implores us, we shall also be reconciled to “health reform.” So “practical” is the “godliness” of Day of Atonement faith that our long-indulged

perverted appetites can be re-educated to enjoy a simple healthful diet. You won't miss your harmful favorites. To bring Paul up to date, "Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live *in the flesh* [the flesh where appetite rules] I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

For Paul, the word "flesh" included our appetites for food, for he said, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Is there a better word than "stewardship" in describing our relationship to Jesus in His work of proclaiming the gospel "to every creature"? Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

That command of Jesus requires that we support those who "go." That means, first of all, the giving of tithe—one tenth of our "increase" that the Lord gives us. It's not a legalistic assessment upon us; it's fellowship with Jesus in His work. It's working together with the Lord Jesus in His work of proclaiming the gospel "to every creature" "in all the world."

That's the work that the Lord Jesus loves. A "steward" is someone who cares for property; the word "stewardship" can be understood to imply a legalistic connection with the Lord Jesus in His work of proclaiming the gospel to "every creature."

But it's almost infinitely beyond that; you never get to really know someone until you get down working with him in digging the ditch; "stewardship" rightly understood is getting down in the ditch digging with

the Lord Jesus; sharing His heart burden for the world.

Jesus said "Go ye . . ." and that requires that we support those who give their lives to "go."

We obeyed the call "Go ye" in 1972, to wherever the Lord would call, to proclaim the third angel's message in verity to the people there. Your "going" may not be to leave home or any place overseas, but it may mean next door; or it may mean, teaching "the everlasting gospel" instead of legalism to children or youth in your local Sabbath School.

If our hearts can be "enlarged" to comprehend the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love [*agape*] of Christ in the true gospel (cf. Ephesians 3:14-21; Psalm 119:32), the Holy Spirit will take over our ministry and our teaching; and everything we do for the Lord Jesus will bear eternal fruit. That will be a happy "stewardship," both for now and for eternity.

At the age of 38, Frances Havergal paid a five-day visit to a family in London, all of whom were either unconverted or unhappy. She prayed that she might help them find Christ. When it came time to leave, she rejoiced that the Lord had answered her prayer, and in her gratitude she wrote her poem, "Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee" (*SDA Hymnal* #330).

Four years later she re-read the poem and was struck by her lines, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold." She wrote a friend that this "now means shipping off all my ornaments to the Church Missionary House (including a jewel cabinet that is really fit for a countess)."

Frances never knew about the heavenly Day of Atonement, but the love (*agape*) of Christ motivated her to give up her jewelry. Can we who know the truth do less?

*“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My riches gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.”—Isaac
Watts.*