

THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST¹

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Going to school is something most people want to get out of as soon as possible. Kids love summer vacation; school discipline is onerous; “commencement” is great—class work is finished.

I enjoyed our little one room school in Cadillac, Michigan. All eight grades were organized in connected row-desks with ink wells. You could look directly at the back of the head of the student in front of you.

I had a crush on our teacher, Miss Kowalski. She was beautiful. She was so smart.

For recess during the wintertime, we bundled up in warm clothes and strapped on our skis. Then we grabbed hold of the rope-tow and skied up the hill. What fun it was to slide down the snow to our school-house and the bottom of the hill!

Everyone has memories of school days growing up. But does God have a “class” where school discipline continues?

In Psalm 25 David seven times prays that he may be a student in the Lord’s “class”; “teach me Your paths,” he asks over and over. We probably don’t know if he was old or young when he wrote this Psalm, but the inspired picture we get in the Bible is Good News—there is never a graduation out of the Lord’s school.

You are always a student, a learner, and He never expels you from His “university,” but of course you are always free to “quit school” if you wish. There is always a temptation to “quit” because as our Teacher the Lord exercises discipline, which our carnal hearts don’t like. “Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens” (Heb. 12:5, 6). It’s not that He is a severe Schoolmaster, but His tuition appears that way to us, for “no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (v. 11). In fact, if the discipline or chastening has ceased and you think you have clear sailing, one of two things has happened: either you are indeed ready for translation (way ahead of almost everybody else), or you are in real trouble, for “if you are without chastening, . . . then you are illegitimate and not sons” (vs. 8).

The writer of Psalm 73 felt at times that the Lord’s discipline was too severe. “I have been . . . chastened every morning” (vs. 14), waking up each new day to renewed “grief” and “vexation” (vs. 21). It seemed that the Holy Spirit would never get through “convicting” him of sin (which is His “first grade” tuition, Jn. 16:8). Would he as a student in the “school of Christ” never get out of that “first grade”? Other “students” seemed to be spared that “discipline.” Life for them was all fun and games. “It was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end” (Ps.

¹ Hebrews 5:8-9. 88, 457.

73:16, 17). Something special is happening right now in the “sanctuary”—the Day of Atonement. Yes! Better stay in school!

THE CHOICE: OLD OR NEW COVENANT

We have a choice: we can live under the old covenant (the still popular way as it has been for millennia), or under the new. And if we choose to live under the new covenant, all will go well with us; right?

If we are driving, all the lights will turn green for us; the boss will give us a raise; our spouse will smile sweetly at us; our investments will prosper. Right?

Jesus surely lived under the new covenant, but He also died under it; from His boyhood He met constant opposition and turmoil that led Him eventually to the cross. No, new covenant living is not a picnic.

As a student in the “school of Christ” you are under serious, loving discipline (Heb. 12:5-10). Some setbacks and disappointments may be good for you in the long run. But the Lord tempers our trials, giving each of us the benefit of infinite wisdom. To each of us is given the “measure of faith” that makes life where His providence has placed us a thing of quiet, steady joy.

Even Jesus in His incarnation endured discipline. We read that “He [learned] obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). You will someday thank the Lord Jesus for permitting certain disappointments to come to you; your present happiness can be greatly enhanced by anticipating this through your confidence in His faithfulness. The

joy of the future can become yours in the present through faith.

The first message Jesus gave to the assembled disciples after His resurrection was, “Peace be unto you” (John 20:19). This is no vain compliment; peace of heart is what you long for and He gives it to you today. “My peace I give to you,” and that is in the midst of tribulation (John 14:27). The peace comes with your believing the new covenant promises, all seven of them in Genesis 12:2, 3.

You may have to pray the prayer of Mark 9:24: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” A wise writer assures us that we can never perish while we pray that prayer. Every little prayer you pray, making that choice, makes you stronger in the Lord.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO OVERCOME?

A big problem faced by teachers is student resistance. Nobody likes change. Students resist change. Sometimes teachers bend over backwards to help students and they still resist.

A student failing his class has an irate parent who claims that he has not been kept informed of the situation. He claims that his child needs special treatment because of learning issues. The student tests with a good mental capacity. He just doesn't care about his studies.

Toward the end of the semester the teachers set forth a plan whereby the student can bring his grade up to a D. But the student is still resistant to change and learning and ends the course in failure.

Is it possible that sinners (like all of us are born to be!) can overcome sin and become truly Christ-like in character? Can “the righteousness of the law”

(perfect obedience, perfect loyalty) ever be achieved in this life?

The Bible quite clearly says: “all have sinned, and continue [present tense] to come short” (Rom. 3:23). Our very nature is sinful; and even “saints” can’t help showing that they are sinners. Nobody is perfect. So is perfection of character an impossible dream?

The Bible insists on a Good News answer—yes! God sent His beloved Son into the world on the special mission to “save His people *from* their sins,” not *in* them (Mt. 1:21). Rom. 8:3, 4 says that He was “sent . . . to condemn sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” The word “righteousness” used there means the righteous character of those who “walk after the Spirit.” (It’s *dikaionomata*, the imparted righteousness of saints, Rev. 19:8, whereas *dikaionosune* always is the imputed righteousness of Christ). Heb. 13:21 says that the Saviour will “make you perfect in every good work to do His will.” And Rev. 14:1-5 describes a people at the close of time who “are without fault before the throne of God,” who “follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” Not part way, but totally. They will refuse “the mark of the beast” and will receive “the seal of God” (Rev. 13:16, 17; 7:1-4).

Are they fanatics? Extremists? Strait-laced grumpy “saints”? No way! Jesus got in on the perfection debate Himself on the Good News side. He said: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). In saying so, He gives us the key to unlock the perplexity. His context is

learning to love like the Father loves, who sends His rain and sunshine on the just and on the unjust, who loves bad people, even His enemies. Jesus’ idea of “perfection” is simple: learning to love like that! John learned the idea from Him, for he also says that if you’ve learned to love like that, you “know God,” you’re “born of God,” He “dwells in” you, you have “His Spirit,” and you yourself “dwell in God.” Furthermore, you overcome fear (which goes along with sin), and you end up “perfect” (see 1 Jn. 4:7-18). True, you and I were born totally bereft of such love (*agape*); but there’s a filling station where the Holy Spirit “sheds it abroad in our hearts” (Rom. 5:5). Or to change the metaphor, it’s the simple matter of going to school to learn it, “the school of the Christ.” The “best,” proudest person must matriculate through the kindergarten.

ELIJAH AND JEREMIAH IN SCHOOL

You’d think that if a person knew that even before he was born, he was called of God to be a prophet, such a high honor would give him a healthy sense of self-respect. The Lord told that to Jeremiah (1:5), but here he is so down in the dumps that he wishes he could die (1:5; 9:1, 2; 20:14-18). Of all the Lord’s prophets, he is the most open in telling us of his inner battles with self and his disappointments in his relationship with the Lord.

Elijah also wished he could die (1 Kings 19:4), but the Lord gave him the very high honor of being translated, and not dying. Isaiah went through an experience of deep humbling of his heart before God (6:5), but the Lord gave him the joy of ministry to a king who appreciated him (37:1, 2, etc.). But

Jeremiah! He suffered nothing but rejection and disappointment for his entire lifetime, and even after the remnant of people who were left alive after the ruin of the kingdom saw the unmistakable evidence that he had been right all along in his ministry, they treated him like dirt (43:2-6ff). His story comes to an end in tragedy.

After he was dead, his people changed their mind about him, and they rated him the greatest of the prophets, even thinking that Jesus Christ might be Jeremiah resurrected (Matt. 16:14). People have experienced painful disappointments in life. They are little “Jeremiahs” and they will come up to him in the new earth and thank him for writing his book!

One experience in his life is of special encouragement to all of us who are “students in the school of Christ.” Jeremiah prays in 10:23-24: “O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.” Do you believe the gracious, kind Lord answered that prayer? Yes! Did He bring the poor servant of His “to nothing”? No! Jeremiah tells us how the Lord kindly rebuked him, corrected him, disciplined him as a “student” in His school (15:15-21), and made a great man out of him. You are a student, too. Don’t quit “school”!

THE HOLY SPIRIT OUR TEACHER

Now in John 16:26 Jesus made a fantastic promise: “The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” There are reports in the media about the tragic inroads of memory failure, how a significant

percentage of Baby Boomers now enjoying full possession of their mental faculties will have memory failure during the next few decades, and lose them.

Jesus promised that His Holy Spirit will reactivate our memories, obviously working to preserve the mental apparatus that makes memory function. This has to be an anti-memory-failure ministry, or the promise means nothing. But wait: it’s not an encouragement to present-day mental laziness. Reports in news magazines emphasize the hope that people who keep exercising their mental faculties are less likely to have memory failure; and what Jesus says seems to be in agreement. “The Holy Spirit . . . shall teach you all things . . . whatsoever [Christ has] said unto you.” That’s the big *if*, the condition for the fulfillment of this blessed promise.

It means daily learning in the school of Christ, sitting at His feet to actually gain some new knowledge, it means daily spiritual growth in the truths of the Bible, it means a humble heart always ready to learn from even “the humblest of God’s servants” (according to one thoughtful writer), a sense of contrition, a definite “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” it means a conscious choice to abandon our popular claim to be “rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing.” It means a sensing the reality of one’s being “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” It means soaking up “the knowledge of the truth” like a sponge. It means being mentally honest, transcending a vague “honesty of heart” that is

satisfied with merely understanding a few cut-and-dried “doctrines” that you have rehashed dozens of times. It means more than proudly reading “quotations.”

The promise of Jesus seems clear: if we will “learn” the “all things” He has tried to teach us, then the Holy Spirit will bring them all “to our remembrance.” When old age comes over you, you may forget your grandchildren’s names, but you won’t forget the “third angel’s message in verity” which He has taught you to love, or its Good News that you can share with your grandchildren.

LEARNING IN THE SANCTUARY SCHOOL

If we cannot learn from history, what hope is there for the future? The glory of the sanctuary message awaits our understanding. The sanctuary truth is a “landmark” of that message, distinct and unmovable. It is the foundation and central pillar of the advent faith and is based on that text which stirred the thinking of William Miller: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (Dan. 3:14).

If the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of this Daniel text is not correct, there is then no reason for our existence as a distinct people. If on the other hand as we firmly believe it is correct, there is in this truth the key to the mystery of God-likeness. This means divinity joined to humanity so that humanity might be joined to divinity.

The sanctuary truth provides the setting for understanding the Biblical Sabbath, and knowing the true “rest” which the Lord desires His people to have—rest from the burden of sin. Rest in Him.

The sanctuary truth forever proves the lie of the enemy in the garden of Eden when he said, “Ye shall not surely die.” If the “soul” is immortal, then Christ did not really die on the cross and there is no saviour, and all Christianity is but a sham. It is no wonder the enemy is so diligent and utterly persistent to destroy this great truth of the sanctuary. We have been told: “The arch-deceiver hates the great truths that bring to view an atoning sacrifice and an all-powerful Mediator. He knows that with him everything depends on his diverting minds from Jesus and His truth.”²

The grand significance of this truth may be seen further in the following: “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was his death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil.”³

CALVARY IMMORTALIZED

Seventh-day Adventists know that Christ is the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary and that the final work of judgment is now in process. We know that when the work of cleansing this sanctuary is completed, that Christ will pronounce, “It is done”. We also know that it is past time for this work in the sanctuary to have been completed. If well over one hundred years is not enough to complete the cleansing, how many years will be required? Our conscience tells us that this whole matter is worthy

² *The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

of earnest consideration.

The Adventists of the 1844 disappointment era, came to realize that their experience was clearly portrayed in the book of Revelation, chapter 10. The little book that was “sweet as honey”, while being the book of Revelation, was also their experience in love and high anticipation of the Lord’s return in the Fall of 1844, or as they reckoned on the tenth day of the seventh month. When their hopes were not fulfilled, the matter for the time was indeed “bitter”. That they should go before “many peoples, and nations, and tongues”, to proclaim a further message was staggering, but they accepted the call from God.

According to what the angel said, “there should be time no longer”, or as the margin reads, “no more delay.” Thus, it seems clear that at any time since 1844 the end could have come. In a certain sense “time” is the result of sin, in that it is a little space between two eternities and would never have come into being except because of sin. Therefore it can be said that since the year 1844, it has been the plan of Heaven that sin should be no more. Such a thing could not have happened at any time previous to 1844, for it was necessary for the longest time prophecy, and the last time prophecy, to be fulfilled. It was not possible for any previous generation to enter into the requisite understanding since the truth of the sanctuary was not yet known.

It would seem clear that in the Divine plan, the 2300 days or years would provide sufficient time for the outworking of sin before the whole universe, and to convince all of its terrible results. From the

time of the cross at Calvary to the year 1844 millions of people would have had a chance to hear something of the life and work and saving grace of Christ. But the basic problem remained the same, namely sin!

Thus as long as sin remained, the “prince of this world” really held man in his domain and the heart of man continued to be “desperately wicked”. Christ certainly did “bruise” the head of the serpent but the serpent was not dead by any means, and to all intents and purposes still reigned in the heart of man.

This cannot be conceived as God’s plan. Jesus came to bring an end to transgression. Before He was born it was proclaimed, “Thou shalt call his name *Jesus*: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

On the day of atonement a new and different work was to be undertaken. The sins of God’s people were to be blotted out. There was to be developed a Christ-like character in a whole generation of people, such as the universe had not seen to that time. What a “landmark” in the light of eternity! Calvary was to be immortalized in the lives of God’s children. Better stay in school!

FURTHER TEACHING FROM THE SANCTUARY

Strict Calvinism says that anyone for whom Christ died has to be saved eternally; Christ cannot fail to accomplish all that He set out to do by means of His sacrifice on His cross; therefore Calvinism’s only possible conclusion is that He did not die for those who will eventually be lost. He predestined them to be lost. It’s a scary doctrine, and there’s a lethal

logic to it. It's anything but "good news." In fact, it's bad news if you are not among those blessed people in Ephesians one and two who have been given everything wonderful. Many people worry about who they are and whether they're the favored ones!

But what the Bible says is that God has predestined everyone to be saved; when Christ died "for the world," He paid the price for everyone's sin; His "much more abounding grace" extends to everyone; if you're a human being in this world, Christ is already your Savior whose infinite love is to you personally as if you were the only lost soul on earth. You have freedom of choice and you can despise and reject Him, but that doesn't alter the fact that He gave Himself for you and to you.

The Ephesians gospel "Good News" is explained elsewhere in the Bible:

(a) We are all born into the world under a blanket of legal condemnation inherited from our sinful head of the human race, Adam.

(b) But thanks to Jesus Christ, we are also born under a legal blanket of vindication in Him. He has become our "last Adam," our new Head of the human race. He has been made to be sin for everyone, has taken everyone's full guilt upon Himself, has died the death that would have come upon us all "in Adam" (Rom. 5:8-18).

(c) That means God is sincere and honest in His purpose formed "before the foundation of the world" to save eternally every member of the human race. He has stacked the cards against no one. Ephesians one is dead right; you don't have to do

something to make Jesus become your Friend and Savior, as so many of us preachers have often said; He already is!

(d) We can choose to live under which ever "blanket" we choose. Live "in Christ" (as you already are in a legal or objective sense), and you are enrolled "in the school of Christ" where the Holy Spirit becomes your "Teacher" to "teach" you to "deny" the clamors of your fallen, sinful nature inherited from Adam. He actually trains you to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world" (Titus 2:11, 12). He convicts you of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-11), takes you by the hand and leads you all the way into the New Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 41:13).

A boy and girl were playing together. The boy had a collection of marbles. The girl had some chocolates with her.

The boy told the girl that he will give her all his marbles in exchange for her chocolates. The girl agreed.

The boy kept the biggest and the most beautiful marble aside and gave the rest to the girl. The girl gave him all her chocolates as she had promised.

That night, the girl slept peacefully. But the boy couldn't sleep as he kept wondering if the girl had hidden some chocolates from him the way he had hidden his best marble.

If you don't give yourself a hundred percent to Jesus, you'll always keep doubting if Jesus has given Himself one hundred percent to you. Don't resist Him any longer!