

GROWING UP¹
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Are we in the midst of the historical crisis of the ages? Yes! The return of Christ is being delayed.

A father may have a heavy problem trying to support his family, but the little child has no understanding of it that hinders or shadows his play. The little child can sense only his own individual suffering of hunger. His personal metabolism allows no more. He can never splice into his father's anguish, or feel a spasm of his pain, or a prick of his woe. A little child cannot feel corporately what a parent feels corporately for him.

But a woman who is "grown up unto the measure of the stature of the fullness" of a man (Eph. 4:13) can "feel corporately for him" if she loves him as a bride loves a husband.

Could it be that the cosmic problem that troubles the heart of God is a certain prophetic "woman" who is still in the kindergarten state of heart and has resisted "growing up"? Can she not yet corporately share the heart-burden her Savior feels? Is her concern still fundamentally only self-centered? Do we still consider (as we have in the past) that our own individual, personal salvation is the greatest concern in the universe? Or can we begin to sense a concern for Christ Himself?

His name is still "Emmanuel, . . . God with us." He is still one of us in humanity as well as one with the Father in His divinity. Ellen White declared in 1904

¹ Isa. 53:10-12. 240, 206.

that as the consequence of some dark episodes of history "in a great degree," "the disappointment of Christ is beyond description."² The "loud cry" has been long delayed.

Our thoughts are to be lifted above our preoccupation with our own salvation to the possibility of sensing a concern for Jesus in the great controversy for His sake, beyond our little sake.

We are assured that Christ felt corporately at the cross all the combined anguish of humanity. But is it fair that we sense no corporate involvement with Him in His anguish and His sacrifice—not that in any way we assist in our personal salvation, but our minds and hearts can begin to appreciate what it cost Him to save us. We must not be content to remain forever in our kindergarten comprehension. The "most precious message . . . the Lord sent to His people"³ began to emphasize that heart-concern for Jesus as transcending our selfish concerns in this "great controversy."

Paul was deeply impressed that Christ expects, or at least hopes, that those for whom He died the second death will "come out" of the self-centered fog of "Babylon" with its old covenant environment of self-concern, and begin to feel a spasm of His pain, a prick of His anguish.

"Know ye not," Paul says, "that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" That must mean some kind of personal

² Ellen G. White, "A Call to Repentance," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Dec. 15, 1904).

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 91.

involvement. “We are buried with Him by baptism into death. . . . We have been planted together in the likeness of His death. . . . Our old man is crucified with Him. . . . If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:3-8). “I am crucified with Christ,” he tells the Galatians (2:20). It’s over and over “with Him.” That is corporate involvement on the part of believers. It is in the sense of heart appreciation, entering “into” His experience by something the Bible calls “faith,” heart-involvement with the Son of God in His divine career as Savior of both the world and of the universe. “The government” of the universe is “on His shoulders” (Isa. 9:6; we can’t “lift,” but we can appreciate the weight He carries!).

A national news magazine featured an article on Mary the mother of Jesus; understandably it pays lip service to the Roman Catholic dogma of Mary as a mediatrix to whom people should pray, but it also visits a neo-Protestant view of Mary as the one outstanding example of someone who believed, quoting an old Protestant idea that “if she had not believed, she would not have conceived.” When the “sword”⁴ Simeon predicted “pierced” Mary’s soul when she watched her Son crucified, she was “crucified with Him.” She “participated,” in a sense died “with Him” for she was His “parent.” She felt more than a “spasm of [His] pain, a prick of [His] woe.” Hers was corporate involvement—deepest heart appreciation in so far as her understanding

⁴ *Ramphaia*, the LXX word for Goliath’s.

allowed. Now we have come to the end of time, two millennia later.

Is it possible that “144,000” people can “grow up” to “follow the Lamb [the crucified Christ] wherever He goes”?⁵ If the answer is yes, this group will demonstrate publicly a reflection of Christ’s final victory of the great controversy. He won the victory over Satan in His life and sacrifice; now His people gain the same victory over the “flesh” and temptation. As Mary’s capacity to share corporate fellowship with her Son was the consequence of her initial choice to “believe,” so will this last-days’ corporate group learn what it means to “believe.”

Jesus will have won the battle 100%. His saints will deserve no credit whatever. But the world and the universe will know that at last there has been some compensation for Christ as regards His great sacrifice: at last His character of self-emptying *agape* has been perfectly reflected in a diversity of people from all over the world. At last He can “see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

In 144,000 aspects of sin-captivity, Satan has sought to keep humanity enmeshed by sin. Satan has claimed that they have proved that he is the victor in the great controversy, and untold numbers of humans have felt they must agree with him: sin is too strong for sin-natured and sin-nurtured humans ever to “overcome,” they think. In human flesh He “condemned sin in the flesh” 2000 years ago; but

⁵ Rev. 14:1-5; we are not concerned here whether that’s a literal or symbolic number; “the Lamb’s wife” of 19:7, 8 is a corporate body who likewise “follows” Him intimately.

now comes the undisputed evidence that the human race can also “condemn sin” in their human flesh. The great controversy will be declared an unqualified victory for Christ, for His professed people are no longer childishly content to remain “lukewarm.”

Why does He invite “the angel of the church of the Laodiceans” to take a seat around the conference table of the government of the universe? “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.” (Rev. 3:21). That indicates solemn responsibility and corporate fellowship. These people are beyond obsession for their own petty security, but with Christ’s concern for them, “the zeal of [His] house has eaten [them] up” (John 2:17). At last they have related His cross to the issues of the great controversy, and they have grown to become as “one with Him” as a loving bride has (through his wooing) become as one with her bridegroom.

If “God is love,” love is power. The final manifestation of the Holy Spirit will be a demonstration by the church of that powerful love of God: “It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. . . .

“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. The children of God are to

manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.⁶

We recognize that this is yet future. No one can point to a time in our history and say, “Here this blessing was received, and here these final prophecies were fulfilled.”

Love as *agape* is not a namby-pamby, mushy sentimentalism. The same God who is *agape*, is also “a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). That fire is death to selfishness, sensuality, love of the world, pride and arrogance. When that true love does impregnate the church as fire permeates the coal, she will become super-efficient in soul winning. Each congregation, “Jerusalem” to its local community, will be what Christ would be to that community were He there in the flesh. Cleansed by fire, the church will become an extension of Christ’s power to redeem lost people.

The Holy Spirit at last can do His final work in the human heart. This is because members will receive the “mind of Christ.”

“Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. . . . The rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. . . . A large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.”⁷

What could those “rays of light” be except the love of God seen in His people? One’s mind staggers to

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

try to imagine the joy that will flow like a river when the Lord's pure good news goes forth in glory and power. How many human hearts now in darkness will meet Christ and find in Him their soul's longing!

Too often our congregation is a comfortable, exclusive religious club, whereas the Lord declares that it is "an house of prayer for all people," including "sinners" we haven't thought much about.

Why does God send sunlight and rain on "the just and the unjust," even His enemies? The answer: His love is something that is not natural for us to have. If we could manipulate the bounties of nature, we might easily feel that our discriminating between good and bad people would be more efficient in persuading the bad to become good than God's way of showering blessings on both alike.

Many people are counted by the Lord as His, scattered all around us, whom now we consider hopeless. Yet they are just as much His as was Mary Magdalene, or the thief on the cross. The moment we try to be selective in our love, we forfeit connection with the Holy Spirit.

As the Pharisees and scribes murmured, so we are too easily scandalized because Christ "receiveth sinners" (Luke 15:1, 2). But the greater the evil of the sinner, the greater is God's glory in redeeming him: "The divine Teacher bears with the erring through all their perversity. His love does not grow cold; His efforts to win them do not cease. With outstretched arms He waits to welcome again and again the erring, the rebellious, and even the apostate. . . . Though all are precious in His sight, the rough, sullen, stubborn dispositions draw most

heavily upon His sympathy and love; for He traces from cause to effect. The one who is most easily tempted, and is most inclined to err, is the special object of His solicitude."⁸

Now, to be practical, how can we learn this kind of love?

By seeing Christ as He truly is. Perfectly sinless, nevertheless His repentance "in behalf of the sins of the world" taught Him how weak He was apart from strength from His Father. He knew He could fall. Born in the river that sweeps us into sin through the force of its undertow, He stood firm on the rock of faith in His Father, perfectly resisting that undertow, even when it appeared that He was forsaken. The Father sent His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh" In very truth He is our "brother." He bore the guilt of "every sinner."

Zechariah describes this vision of Christ: "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." When we thus look upon Him with understanding, we shall realize a new sense of oneness with Him. We will feel toward Him a heart union that will cancel out the appeal of worldly allurements and self-concern. This will indeed be a miracle.

The point of Zechariah's prophecy is that shared repentance felt for corporate guilt will trigger the reception and exercise of this overflowing love. The ability to feel for and to love every sinner was the only way that Christ's heavenly *agape* could be true to itself. Its expression was the direct result of His own experience in our flesh of corporate

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 294.

repentance. And He encourages us. We too are to learn to love even as He has loved us. Zechariah's prophecy indicates a last-day miracle of "grace." The atonement effected at the cross and applied from the heavenly sanctuary will produce a cleansing in God's believing people.

Only a repentance such as this can make sense of the expression, "The Lord our righteousness." The one who feels that by nature he has at least some righteousness of his own will feel that he is to that extent better than someone else. Feeling so, Christ to him will be a stranger. And so, then, must the sinner likewise be a stranger to him.

It is natural to human nature for us to abhor the genuine truth of Christ's righteousness. We naturally resent the contrition implicit in seeing in Christ all our righteousness. We shrink from putting ourselves in the place of the alcoholic, the drug addict, the criminal, the prostitute, the rebel, the derelict. We so easily say in heart, "I could never sink to such a depth."

So long as we feel thus, we are powerless to speak as Jesus did an effective word to help. Love for souls is frozen. Restrained and selfishly directed, it ceases to be love. It's bad enough that we decline to enter the kingdom of heaven ourselves through letting the Holy Spirit melt down our deep-frozen hearts. But it's worse that we can actually shut up the kingdom, barring the way so that neither the contemporary Mary Magdalene or the thief on the cross can surmount our obstacles to get in.

Blessed would be the millstone to be hung around the necks of unloving saints, and blessed would be their drowning in the sea, said Jesus, rather than that they should face in the Judgment the results of a lifelong lovelessness. "It were better not to live than to exist day by day devoid of that love which Christ has enjoined upon His children."⁹

According to Christ's call, it is time now for us to understand that the guilt of the whole world's sin, its frustrated enmity against God, its despair, its rebellion—all is "mine" apart from the grace of God; and if Christ were to withdraw from me that grace, I would embody the whole of its evil, for "in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). Until we fully appreciate that truth, we cannot fully realize the imparted righteousness of Christ.

This is why the repentance Christ begs us to accept takes us back to Calvary. It is impossible to repent truly of minor sins without repenting of the major sin which underlies all other sin. The heavenly High Priest is not in the business of plucking fruit off of bad trees. He will lay His axe unto the root, or He will leave the "tree" alone. The underlying idea behind the message of Christ's righteousness is that I possess not a shred of righteousness of my own, and only when I see it can I discern the gift of His.

"According to your faith be it unto you," is the measure of our receptivity. By true repentance, we accept the gift of contrition and forgiveness for all sin of which we are potentially capable, not merely

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 266.

for the few sins which we think we have personally committed. Thus we receive from Christ potential righteousness equal to His own perfection, at present far beyond our capacity. But it is as real as the potential guilt we can realize in behalf of the sins of the world.

Like the Lord Himself, the penitent “delighteth in mercy,” and discovers his greatest pleasure in finding apparently hopeless material and helping these people become subjects of God’s grace: “Tell the poor desponding ones who have gone astray that they need not despair. Though they have erred, and have not been building a right character, God has joy to restore to them, even the joy of His salvation. He delights to take apparently hopeless material, those through whom Satan has worked, and make them the subjects of His grace. . . . Tell them there is healing, cleansing for every soul. There is a place for them at the Lord’s table.”¹⁰

Paul’s doctrine must at last come into its own, that the seed sown nearly two thousand years ago may begin to bear the blessed fruit that the whole creation has groaned and travailed together in pain to see.

The repentance Christ calls for is already beginning to be realized. When one member in a congregation falls into sin, a little reflection can convince many of the members that they share in his or her guilt. Had we been more alert, more kind-hearted, more ready to speak “a word in season to him that is weary,” more effective in communicating

the pure, powerful truth of the gospel, we might have saved the erring member. With knowledgeable pastoral care, almost any church can at present be led to feel at least some of this corporate concern.

It is encouraging therefore to believe that within *this generation*, a large sense of loving concern can be realized on a worldwide scale. When this time comes (and it will come unless hindered), there will be a heart-unity and concern between races, nationalities, and social and economic cultures seldom seen as yet. The fulfillment of Christ’s ideal will be on all levels and among all groups. The winter of frozen inhibitions and fears will give way to a glorious spring and summer where the loves and sympathies that God has implanted in our souls will find more true and pure expression to one another.

It will be impossible any longer to feel superior or patronizing toward people whose race, nationality, or culture is different from ours. With “the mind of Christ,” a bond of sympathy and fellowship is established “in Him.” This miracle will follow the laws of grace.

This will take God’s people a step further. Instead of limiting itself to a shared repentance in behalf of our contemporary generation of the living, it will take in past generations as well. Paul’s idea, “As the body is one, and hath many members, . . . so also is Christ,” will be seen to include the past body of Christ also. Thus Moses’ command to repent for the sins of previous generations will make sense (Lev. 26:40). The “final atonement” becomes a

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 234.

reality, and the pre-Advent judgment can then be concluded.

While there will be a shaking, and some, perhaps many, who refuse repentance will abandon fellowship, the inspired word implies that a true remnant of believers in Christ will remain. The shaking of the tree or branches is not all bad news. It offers the good news that “gleaning grapes shall be *left* in it” (cf. Isa. 17:6; 24:13). Those who are *left* “shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord” (vs. 14). Those who are shaken out will only make “manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19). God’s work will go forward unhindered and greatly strengthened.

In this time, the church will be united and coordinated like a healthy human body. Backbiting, evil-surmising, gossip, even forgetfulness of the needs of others, will be overcome. The listening ear, tuned to be sensitive to the call of the Holy Spirit, will hear and act upon the conviction of duty. When He says as He said to Philip the deacon, “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot,” the obedient response will be immediate; and a soul will be won as Philip won the Ethiopian official from Candace’s royal court. At last the Holy Spirit will find a perfectly responsive “temple” in which to dwell; and rejoicing over His people with singing, the Lord will gladly bring into their fellowship all His people now scattered in Babylon.

Miracles of heart-healing will come as if Christ Himself were present in the flesh. Chasms of estrangement will be bridged. Marital dissensions will find solutions that have evaded the best efforts

of counselors and psychiatrists. Broken homes will be cemented in the bonds of love that elicits ultimate contrition from believing hearts. Harps now silent will ring with melody when the strings are touched by this hand. Bewildered and frustrated youth will see a revelation of Christ never before discerned. Satan’s enchantment of drugs, liquor, immorality, and rebellion will lose its hold, and the pure, joyous tide of youthful devotion to Christ will flow to the praise of His grace. “The Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:2, 3).

The world and the vast universe beyond will watch with wonder the final demonstration of the fruits of Christ’s sacrifice. In a profound sense hardly dreamed of by the pioneers of the Advent Movement, the heavenly sanctuary, nerve center of God’s great controversy with Satan, will be “cleansed,” justified, set right before the universe.

Such an experience of repentance will transform the church into a dynamo of love. It is God’s plan that no church will have seating capacity for the converted sinners who will stream into it. Because He took the steps the sinner must take in repentance, Christ was enabled to pass by no human being as “worthless.” Corporate and denominational repentance is the whole church experiencing this same Christ-like love and empathy for all for whom He died.

Beware of the sinful unbelief that doubts how good the Good News is. Those who say, “It’s too good to be true! It just can’t happen!” should repent of

rejecting the heavenly vision. In the days of Elisha, Samaria suffered a terrible siege famine. “A donkey’s head cost eighty pieces of silver, and half a pound of dove’s dung cost five pieces of silver.” There was frightful cannibalism. Blaming the Lord for it all, the king wanted to kill the prophet. Here was enmity against God in action!

Elisha responded by promising that within twenty-four hours “ten pounds of the best wheat or twenty pounds of barley” would be selling in the city gates for only “one piece of silver.” The instant reaction of “the personal attendant of the king” was unbelief—such plenty would be too good to be true. “That can’t happen,” he retorted, “—not even if the Lord himself were to send grain at once!”

“You will see it happen, but you won’t get any of the food,” Elisha replied.

The story continues: “It so happened that the king of Israel had put the city gate under the command of the officer who was his personal attendant.” The Lord frightened away the invading Syrians and they left their huge supplies for the starving Israelites. The officer was “trampled to death by the people at the city gate” (2 Kings 7:1-20, TEV).

Unbelief in this “time of the latter rain” will shut us out from taking part in the glorious experience that the Lord foretells for His people once they repent in response to His call. Inspired statements confirm the vision of the “whole church” within history fully experiencing such blessing, doubtless following its purification:

“The Holy Spirit is to animate and pervade the whole church, purifying and cementing hearts.”¹¹

“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. . . . All will be in harmony with the mind of God.”¹²

“In visions of the night representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God’s people. . . . A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great day of Pentecost. . . . Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence. . . . There seemed to be a reformation such as we witnessed in 1844.

“Yet some refused to be converted. . . . These covetous ones became separated from the company of believers.”¹³

Here is where we take off our shoes for we tread solemnly on holy ground. Let us pray that the Spirit of God may employ many voices to echo the call. Let no one underestimate the importance of his or her personal, individual response. Perhaps all the Lord needs is to find *one* person somewhere who is baptized and crucified and risen “with Christ” and who thus shares *His* experience of repentance.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 251.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 126.

Then the precious leaven of truth can permeate the whole body.