

“LIGHTENED WITH HIS GLORY. . .”

By Paul Penno, Jr.

November 18, 2009

“In the condition of the world today we see the terrible result of living for self. God's Spirit is being withdrawn from the earth, which in its moral pollution is as it was before the flood, and as it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. So great is the corruption of the cities, that the moral atmosphere is as poisonous as the atmosphere of a pesthouse. From generation to generation sin has demoralized society, bringing a continual increase of depravity and degradation. Soon, from the highest authority in the universe will come the word, Shorten the days, lest no flesh be saved.” (R&H February 11, 1802).

The divorce rate in the US now is rampant. Millions of children are living in divorced homes. Drug and alcohol abuse has ruined millions of people so that they are fast becoming incapable of even listening to the third angel's message. TV has corrupted vast numbers of people here. If I know the Holy Spirit at all, He is not a welcome guest in any Christian institutions. Almost universally self is the center of attraction in our Christian gatherings.

How will the “word” be spoken, “Shorten the days lest no flesh be saved.” Will the Lord suddenly decree, “This is it, let the Second Coming take place whether anyone is ready or not”? Or will the word come to His people, “Shorten the days . . .”? COL 69 says that we can hasten or delay the coming of the Lord. “It is the privilege of every

Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.”

The gospel is most certainly Good News. Not that the Lord saves us in our sins but from our sins. His job is being such a Saviour. And He is very capable.

Is there a danger of making the good news too good?

It's not good news that He leaves us to wallow in sin while we cherish a vain hope. He does deliver from sin, and thus can prepare a people for His second coming. That News cannot be too good!

No, that Good News is good because the grace of God imparts to the believing heart a desire to give up sin. Then the believer is motivated to full obedience. Jesus says:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (Acts 26:14).

I have heard that the 1888 message interprets some texts like this backwards from the way we have always understood.

Yes, that may be true. The pure gospel always upsets lukewarm church members. The usual understanding that has been drilled into our people, and especially our youth, is that it is very hard to be a good Christian, and very easy to be lost. Jesus says the opposite, as anyone can see who will consider His words of life.

Here is another text that has usually been understood backwards:

“The flesh lusteth [strives] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:17).

Most of us have thought this means that we cannot do the good things we would like to do. But if we believe how good the Good News is, the Holy Spirit turns out to be stronger than the flesh, and since He is striving against the flesh, we cannot do the evil things it would prompt us to do.

Light is stronger than darkness; love is stronger than hatred; grace is stronger than sin; and the Holy Spirit is stronger than the flesh. The 1888 view has to be correct, for verse 16 says: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Yes, the Bible may say that the Good News is very good; but doesn't Ellen White say it is not as good as that?

Ellen White never contradicts the Bible, and certainly not the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible for us to read into her writings our own Arminian ideas that we have nurtured all our lives. Thus we can read her like the ancient Jews read the Old

Testament—with a veil upon our heart (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:14-16).

It is possible to take words, phrases, clauses, sentences, from Ellen White and string them together to give the impression that she is denying what Jesus said about His yoke being “easy” and His burden “light.” But she did say very clearly:

“Do not conclude that the upward path is the hard and the downward road the easy way. All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God's love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves. . . And all the way up the steep road leading to eternal life are well-springs of joy to refresh the weary” (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 139).

If this turns out to be true, the Good News is very good. But how does the Holy Spirit strive so successfully against the flesh?

The Holy Spirit comes as a Comforter (“*parakletos*” means the One called to come and sit down beside us and never leave us; “*para*” as in parallel, and “*kletos*,” called). He will never turn away from us unless we beat Him off (John 14:16-18; 16:7-13).

An example of how He works is in Isaiah 30:21: “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” As you consider your life, you can see that when you have made mistakes, it has always been because you have not listened to that “word.”

Our part is to listen to Him, to pay attention, to respond to Him, to let Him guide us. When he convicts us of sin, our part is to choose, "Thank You Lord; I believe it and I gladly give up the sin." Otherwise, we are resisting Him, and that is the only way one can be lost.

The point of the 1888 message is that God is much more desirous of our being saved than we have thought. It's the job of the great High Priest to cleanse His sanctuary, not our job; yet we are to cooperate with Him, to let Him do it.

I would like to know more about why the gospel is such Good News. This is a different idea!

To appreciate the grand dimensions of *agape* supplies the missing motivation to serve the Lord. All self-centered motivation based on fear or hope of reward is childish, like the flower girl at the wedding who cares only for the cake and ice cream. In that sense, she is "under the law" (cf. Romans 6:14). The bride has discovered a better motivation for coming to the wedding—she is concerned for the bridegroom and couldn't care less about the refreshments. She is "under grace," under a new motivation imposed by a mature heartfelt appreciation for the character, personality, and person of the bridegroom.

Paul could have chosen to despise that love, and trample upon the crucified Redeemer. But he chose to believe the gospel. He goes on to tell us why it became such a powerful motivating force to him:

We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead [or, all would be dead if He had not died for them]: 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).

Can you explain why the New King James Version actually says it is "difficult" to be saved. Matthew 7:14 Doesn't this contradict the 1888 message?

The NKJV text does say: "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." But the KJV does not say "difficult," nor do other translations.

The Greek word translated "difficult" is *thlibo*, which means "compressed," "squeezed," "hemmed in like a mountain gorge." But it is easy to pass through a narrow gorge if you drop your baggage. "Our" baggage is the love of self.

Yes, but dropping my baggage is what I find so difficult. It's not easy to give up self.

That is true unless we have seen the cross of Jesus. Go to Gethsemane, kneel down beside Jesus as He sweats drops of blood in His agony of temptation and hear Him pray, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I wily but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). When your heart enters ink union with Him by faith, you will find it easy to drop your baggage of the love of self, because you will be "incorporate in Christ," at one with Him, appreciating what it cost Him to save you. His burden was heavy; yours becomes light when you appreciate how heavy His was.

We make the Good News too good, won't honest people take advantage of it and continue in sin?

No, because “the gospel is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). Nothing else can save us from sin! The sinner is not moved by bad news or by fear, but by the revelation of God’s love “It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour’s matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary’s cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480. It is “the goodness of God [that] leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4). Only a willful misunderstanding can misconstrue the gospel.

It’s all very well to say that it’s easy to be saved, “I believe the Good News.” My problem is that I find it hard to believe.

The most difficult thing we have to “do” is to believe. We have all been born, bred, trained, nurtured, and conditioned, in unbelief. We wake up every morning afresh as an unbeliever, and need to humble our hearts anew to choose to believe.

A thousand times a day we need to choose again to believe what the Lord says. “I die daily,” says Paul (1 Corinthians 15:31). Israel could not “enter in” their Promised Land because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-19; 4:6), and that is our problem still today.

Our battle is not the battle of works, but always “the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12), in other words, learning how to believe!

How can I learn to believe?

“God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). In other words, the Lord has granted each of us the capability to believe. The word “measure” is *metron*, like a vessel for measuring a liquid. In other words, He has “dealt to every man” a capacity for believing. No one can accuse Him in the judgment day that He withheld that “measure.”

No human being can possibly believe until first of all he hears the unadulterated Good News. No one has a self-starter. You cannot originate faith within yourself apart from understanding the cross and God’s love. We cannot make our own atonement apart from that revelation.

Even faith itself is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). “How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher . . . [of] glad tidings of good things! . . . Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:14-17).

The moment you hear the smallest whisper of that Good News, make a choice immediately to believe it. Don’t delay even a moment.

Do we never have a battle to fight?

Yes, we do have a terrible battle to fight, but it is not where we have often supposed it is—with obedience and hard works that we don’t know how to do. The real battle is with ingrained unbelief.

Fight it! Get on your knees, wrestle your way through that gaze of darkness to the light beyond. If it takes time to fight the battle, it is time well spent. If it takes hours, even days, of fasting and prayer,

you will emerge a victor. The struggle is well worth while. And if we decline the struggle, we must always endure the painful conviction of our sin of unbelief.

I need help in fighting that battle!

You can get the precise help you need in the Bible. David had to fight the same battle over and over again. Read his Psalms. With one single exception (88), each one wrestles its way through unbelief to a choice to believe the Good News. Make your choice to believe, even in what appears to be total darkness, and then you can say with him, “O Lord, truly I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds” (116:16). Then you will find your feet set on the solid rock, and you will have a song to sing for ever afterward (40:1-4).

But all this “battle” does not mean that it is harder to be saved than to be lost, or easier to be lost than it is to be saved. All the angels of heaven are on your side; the Holy Spirit is striving against your flesh; Christ as the Good Shepherd is seeking you and trying to bring you back to His fold again; you have constant evidences of His grace. All this is making it easy for you to be saved, if you will choose to believe.

But if you choose not to believe, you face a wearisome struggle to stifle the convictions of the Holy Spirit. This is His constant pleading—don’t crucify Christ afresh. That is difficult for any honest heart to do!

In Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* we read of Christian asking the way to the Celestial City.

Evangelist points and asks, “Do you see yonder wicket gate?” “No,” says Christian. “Do you see yonder shining light?” Then he wisely replies in behalf of all of us natural-born unbelievers, “I think I do.” Says the Evangelist, “Keep that in your eye, so shalt thou find the gate.”

If you have difficulty seeing the shining light, for sure there is one place where it is not quite as dark as all the rest. “Keep that in your eye.”

But I have heard it often said that although Christ gets us started, we must keep on flying on our own, keeping up our speed or we will crash. I must “read the Bible, pray, and witness,” in order to retain salvation. These are the very things I find difficult to do.

It is good to read the Bible, pray, and witness, but doing these things as works is not the way to retain salvation. If it is true that God takes the initiative in our salvation, it is equally true that He maintains that initiative.

Once you begin the Christian life, the Lord does not back off like a car salesman when you have bought your car; leaving you to struggle thereafter on your own. The Good Shepherd still takes the initiative in looking for His lost sheep. He still keeps knocking at the door of the heart. And “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6, NKJV). Never are we to think that our divine Friend becomes indifferent toward us.

How did Jesus in His humanity maintain his closeness to His Father? He was human; He had only 24 hours a day as we have; He was busy as

we are, and He needed sleep as we do. He gives us a surprising insight into His devotional life: the Father maintained the initiative. Speaking of His prayer and Bible-study life, Jesus says in the prophecy:

The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is weary:
He wakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear
To hear as the learned (Isaiah 50:4, NKJV).
The Lord promises nourishing food to all who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). You are never satisfied with what you learned yesterday, any more than you are satisfied with the food you ate yesterday.

We don’t eat our daily food because the Bible tells us to, or even because Ellen White tells us to; we eat because we are hungry. A starving but hungry refugee in Africa is better off than a millionaire who is so sick that he has no appetite.

The Bible reveals a loving heavenly Father and Saviour and Holy Spirit eager to maintain connection with us. He continually invites us to come to “breakfast,” but of course if we are not hungry, we won’t go.

How can I get this hunger and thirst?

This is what the Lord gives to those who hear and believe the Good News. They want more, just as when you taste something delicious, you want more. They don’t have to set their alarm clocks to

wake up in time, or force themselves to read and pray as a “work.”

We can make a devotional life into a works program. Charles Wesley was right when he wrote his hymn, “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” even though the Church of England divines of the day were outraged at the idea. The Lord is the divine Lover of your soul; He is seeking you, actually wooing you.

But note how Jesus responded to His Father’s daily initiative to awaken Him “morning by morning” to “learn”:

The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away (Isaiah 50:5, NKJV).

Oh, how often we have been “rebellious,” and turned away from His knocking at our door in the mornings! Sometimes it is because we have stayed up to watch the late-late show on TV, so that we have deprived ourselves of proper rest and made ourselves deaf to His appeals. (There is a reason why Scripture says that the day begins at sunset!).

To awaken in our souls that hunger and thirst is the purpose of the 1888 message of Christ’s righteousness. The gospel is the bread of life; and once you taste it, you will ever after want to “eat” without being forced to do so. What joy! Always to be hungry and thirsty for more. The world’s amusements, the TV, sports, vain pursuits, addictive shopping, all lose their appeal when you “taste” the gospel for what it is. Many are now testifying that that hunger has been amused in their souls by hearing or reading the 1888 message truths.

If you get sick with the flu, don't you take a day off from school or work in order to stay in bed and recuperate? Why not take a day off for fasting and prayer? Not seeking the Lord as though He were trying to hide from you, but taking the time to listen to Him as He seeks you.

That's what Isaiah means when he says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (55:6). He is not hiding from you—He is "near." (The Hebrew word translated "seek" means inquire of, pay attention to see 1 Samuel 28:7).