

11. Christian Relationships

Biblical material: *Exod. 20:12; Judges 1:21; Luke 9:23; John 3:13; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-9; 1 John 4:10, 11;*

Quotes:

- Once vigorous measures appear to be the only means left of bringing the Americans to a due submission to the mother country, the colonies will submit. *George III*
- Peace secured by slavish submission is not peace. *Kim Il Sung*
- The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn. *Cicero*
- He who establishes his argument by noise and command shows that his reason is weak. *Michel de Montaigne*
- Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth. *Albert Einstein*

Questions

How do we submit to God? What about questions of authority—how do we evaluate valid authority? How to respect authority without allowing this to become dependence or to be tyrannized? How does this apply to the marriage relationship? What about relationships between children and parents—how can these be improved? Why no Scriptural condemnation of slavery?

Discussion

Often in religion we are told to submit. “Islam” means submission, for example. How do we act in submission to God without giving up our individuality? Is it just a question on unthinking obedience? Note this: “The biblical view of submission in no way teaches a dictatorial, authoritarian, unjust stance in social relationships where one exercises power and the other crawls in helplessness.” (Sunday’s lesson). This comment is made in terms of our human relationships. How does it apply in our relationship with God?

Lucifer objected to God’s authority, and claimed to be a freedom fighter, working to liberate the universe from God the enslaver. In his view, submission to God required abject surrender and a denial of self-being. His accusations make it clear that he promoted the idea of God as tyrant, the absolute dictator of the universe. Transposing such ideas into the area of human relationships results in the same kind of tyranny and oppressive slavery.

So when we read about wives submitting to their husbands, what does this really mean? (Note that wives are “only” “required” to submit. Husbands are required to love their wives. So which is the harder command to follow?). If husbands loved their wives as they do their bodies, what would be the result?! Why is there no command for wives to love their husbands?

What of the concept of becoming one flesh? In our desire for intimacy we look in many directions. Thinking of “becoming one,” how does this safeguard us and our individuality? What are the benefits? What are the dangers?

In our day-to-day experiences with one another, we play out the great controversy in miniature—the conflict and the fights, the love and admiration, the demonstration of whether we follow truth, honesty, right and so on. Read some of the material related to Lucifer’s fall, and you begin to see how insidious sin really is, how by believing a lie you can come to a position where right is wrong and wrong is right. In this process of self-deception, Lucifer came to believe his own propaganda, it seems. What are the lessons for us here?

Ellen White Comments

To those whose loving trust bound them most closely to him, Satan had represented that he was wrongly judged, that his position was not respected, and that his liberty was to be abridged. From misrepresentation of the words of Christ he passed to prevarication and direct falsehood, accusing the Son of God of a design to humiliate him before the inhabitants of heaven.... To sustain his charge of God's injustice toward him, he resorted to misrepresentation of the words and acts of the Creator. It was his policy to perplex the angels with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah. His high position, in such close connection with the divine administration, gave greater force to his representations, and many were induced to unite with him in rebellion against Heaven's authority...

While instilling discontent into the minds of the angels under him, he had artfully made it appear that he was seeking to remove dissatisfaction. When he urged that changes be made in the order and laws of God's government, it was under the pretense that these were necessary in order to preserve harmony in heaven. In His dealing with sin, God could employ only righteousness and truth. Satan could use what God could not-- flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government before the angels, claiming that God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself....

The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the law and government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah...

Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear rather than from love... Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin...

To the very close of the controversy in heaven the great usurper continued to justify himself. When it was announced that with all his sympathizers he must be expelled from the abodes of bliss, then the rebel leader boldly avowed his contempt for the Creator's law. He reiterated his claim that angels needed no control, but should be left to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right. He denounced the divine statutes as a restriction of their liberty and declared that it was his purpose to secure the abolition of law; that, freed from this restraint, the hosts of heaven might enter upon a more exalted, more glorious state of existence.

With one accord, Satan and his host threw the blame of their rebellion wholly upon Christ, declaring that if they had not been reprov'd, they would never have rebelled...

The same spirit that prompted rebellion in heaven still inspires rebellion on earth...

By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, causing Him to be regarded as severe and tyrannical, Satan induced man to sin. And having succeeded thus far, he declared that God's unjust restrictions had led to man's fall, as they had led to his own rebellion. {GC 496-500}

12. The Christian Warfare

Biblical material: *Isa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19; Luke 22:31; Rom. 7:15-20; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Rev. 12:9.*

Quotes:

- My feelings as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. *Adolf Hitler*
- The doctrine of just war, we must remember, flows out of the Christian command to love your neighbor. It is an act of love to wield the sword against evil...*Chuck Colson*
- A strange analogy, child, but indeed, there was a war in heaven, and you see the vanquished now, burning as they fall, like stars. In the darkness before the first dawn, theirs was the first folly; theirs the first rebellion. *Neil Gaiman*

Questions

Why is there a war anyway? What is it over? What weapons are being used? How come we are involved? In the great controversy, are we just pieces being moved in some cosmic chess game? How is this war playing out, and how will it be won? What is our role in vindicating God and his character? How will we know when we've won, or is that the wrong question?

Discussion

The concept of war is often used as a major motivator. Just think of the “war on terror,” for example. Invoking war images however is dangerous, as it can all too often lead us to think that victory is won by force, or that the exploiting the will of the majority is the means to win. The war in heaven was not like an earthly war, and nor is the “Christian war.” The battle is not won by force, but by humility. It is not by might, nor by power. It is by God’s spirit, which is spirit of peace, love, joy, happiness, long-suffering—and all the other divine virtues. If the war could have been won by power, then *all-mighty* God could already have won. The argument however is not over who has the most power. The war is over how that power is used, over the legitimacy of God’s government, over the real nature of his character.

So how do we “help God win”? The question is of course flawed, since God can surely win without our aid. But he has invited our participation, and we certainly make our contributions, to one side or the other. We may sometimes think that we can in our own power fight on the right side and gain the victory. But the Bible and Ellen White make it clear that the battle is not against flesh and blood and that the issues are truly on a huge scale. Our little battles are only meaningful if they play into the wider scheme of things. This is why Ellen White makes the comment that “It is by teaching the truth that we are to defeat the purposes of Satan.” Our role is to identify with God and his character, not because we are forced to, or induced to, but because we agree that right is right, that the moral laws of the universe are entirely well-founded and not arbitrary at all.

Recognizing what we are up against should lead us to be very humble about our own strength and abilities. In and of ourselves we have no capacity to defeat the devil and his unjust use of force. However our role is to make the right choices, to place ourselves on the side of righteousness and truth, demonstrating in our lives that whatever comes we will not give up our clear conviction that God is telling the truth and is entirely trustworthy. In the words of Job, “Though he slay me (and that is a poetic hyperbole, of course), yet will I trust in him.” For the war can only end in victory as God’s case is finally proved entirely and eternally right.

Comment

- WAR. There is no solution for it. There is never a conqueror. The winner generates so much hatred that he is ultimately defeated. *Michel Simon.*
- War is not an adventure. It is a disease. It is like typhus. *St.-Exupery.*
- To call war the soil of courage and virtue is like calling debauchery the soil of love. *George Santayana.*
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. *Matthew 5:9*
- Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace *Romans 14:19*

George Target tells a story called “The War Will Never End.” It’s a memory of the Second World War, and the tragic effects of killing an enemy soldier. Having blown up an Austrian soldier with a hand grenade, Target goes back to the body and takes the dead soldier’s wallet. In it is a letter from the soldier’s wife, and a photo of the daughter, Maria.

As it happened, Target was stationed near this dead soldier’s home just prior to demobilisation. He went to see the family. Why? Who knows.

He met Maria, the girl in the photograph he’d kept. The soldier’s wife was missing, last heard of in the Russian sector. The girl’s grandmother was there, the dead soldier’s mother.

When Target showed her the wallet, the old mother guessed why he’d come. “It makes no matter” she said, “we can do nothing—the war will never end.”

Before he left, Target offered her money.

The old woman said “We do not want money. Are you the cursed Judas? Are you Iscariot? Money? What is money to buy me my son?” He left.

The story ends: “I only knew (and know) that for me the war would never end.”

Ellen White Comments

The evil continued to work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. Then there was war in heaven, and Satan, with all who sympathized with him, was cast out. Satan had warred for the mastery in heaven, and had lost the battle. God could no longer trust him with honor and supremacy, and these, with the part he had taken in the government of heaven, were taken from him.

Since that time Satan and his army of confederates have been the avowed enemies of God in our world, continually warring against the cause of truth and righteousness. Satan has continued to present to men, as he presented to the angels, his false representations of Christ and of God, and he has won the world to his side. Even the professedly Christian churches have taken sides with the first great apostate. {1SM 222}

Enmity between truth and falsehood had existed ever since the fall of Satan. The being who now works so constantly to sow the seeds of error once occupied one of the most exalted positions in the heavenly courts. But he was not satisfied with his position. He determined to be more highly exalted, and he worked to further his ambitious projects until there was war in heaven.

Satan, and those whom he had deceived, and who fought with him, were cast out of heaven, but the warfare has been continued on the earth. In every age Satan has worked through men who have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and teaching deceptive doctrines and principles of satanic origin. Christ taught His disciples how to meet the deceptive work of Satan and his followers. Under a variety of symbols the Saviour presented the work of extending His kingdom of truth and righteousness throughout the world. It is by teaching the truth that we are to defeat the purposes of Satan. {UL 77}

13. The Christian Armor

Biblical material: *John 14:6; 18:38; Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 5:8.*

Quotes:

- Love to God is armor of proof against error. For want of hearts full of love, men have heads full of error; unholy opinions are for want of holy affections. *Thomas Watson*
- If the enemy is giving you fits, it's time to get fitted. *Tim Luke*
- Satan is a liar (John 8:44), but the believer whose life is controlled by truth will defeat him. The girdle holds the other parts of the armor together, and truth is the integrating force in the life of the victorious Christian. *Warren Wiersbe*

Questions

What's the reason for armor? What is Paul trying to communicate here? Could such images give us false self-confidence? What do the elements of the armor reveal about what God most values? If our battle is against spiritual forces, what chance do we have? How does this imagery reflect the fundamental issues in the great controversy?

Discussion

“Onward Christian soldiers” is a favorite hymn of many. Whether it is militancy or militarism, there are dangers. The focus on armor can lead us into an almost comic-book approach to our place in the universe. We need reminding that the battle belongs to God, that this is a war over *his* nature and character, and that it is not solved by force or compulsion. This is in complete contrast to the way we usually think about wars, and therefore the need for armor and weapons. So when it comes to envisaging ourselves as soldiers fitted with body armor and wielding a sword, we need to get away from our usual preconceptions of what is going on.

The comments made by Paul in Ephesians are not designed to make the church militant or military. Quite the opposite. He states that the battle is with “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” So, faced with such foes, he wants to comfort us, the terrified victims in such a conflict, where the power imbalance against us is so great. The armor is primarily defensive, for protection. Even the broadsword was used to ward off blows. Paul is saying that despite the enormity of the conflict, we can have confidence because of God's care and protection for us. He is not saying “get busy fighting!”

The repeated emphasis is on “standing firm,” not attacking or going “on the offensive.” It is also of vital importance to examine what this “armor” consists of. The belt of truth—the first thing of primary importance in God's universe—speaking and being the truth. The breastplate—going over the heart—is righteousness, being and doing right. Interestingly for all the warlike imagery, the feet are shod with the gospel of peace. The shield, another defensive piece of the armor, is faith, our trust in God. Only by our complete trust in God are we safe from the lying attacks of the devil. On the head is the helmet, the assurance of salvation, another gift of God, while the sword is the sword of the spirit, the spirit of humility, gentleness, and love that is exemplified in the Word made flesh.

“The good news, however, is that Jesus' works, His achievement, His holiness, is what gives us *the hope of salvation*. If this hope were based on anything else, that hope would sooner or later be lost.” (Thursday's lesson) Do you agree or disagree—and why?

Comment:

When Elisha's servant was fearful of the Aramaean army (2 Kings 6:8-23), we learn some interesting lessons about the way God wants to work. We learn that God does our fighting. Elisha and his servant weren't told to go and put their armor on. They were shown the might and power of God, and were to allow God to work things out in his own way. That was the means by which God had wanted to lead his children into the promised land—in fact he told them he would go before them and fight their battles for them. But they wanted to fight for themselves, and only when they lost did they come back to ask God for help. How much they are like us. Instead of trusting God for everything we want to do all that we can to make things good for ourselves, and it's only when things don't work out that we turn to God.

Elisha prayed: "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." We need our eyes opened too, so that we may see. On the road to Emmaus the disciples walked and talked with Jesus, and never 'saw' him until the end: He broke bread with them, and the record says "their eyes were opened, and they knew him" (Lk. 24:31). They saw Jesus, and realized what it all meant.

We also learn that God is very merciful. He didn't want to destroy even the Arameans. And even though some of God's people might have rejoiced at them being killed, he didn't use his power to destroy. We must learn that lesson too—that God loves our enemies too. We must never ask him to dispose of our enemies in that way. We must learn the same lesson: Jesus says: "You have heard 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven". (Mt. 5:43-45).

Finally we learn that we have nothing to fear. God is with us, who can be against us? We already knew that—yet we act so often as if we never did. We know God and yet so often forget his nature. So although we agree that God is Almighty and able to meet any situation, we need to catch a glimpse of that same heavenly vision, see the bigger picture, have a larger view...

Ellen White Comments

We must have on the whole armor of God, and be ready at any moment for a conflict with the powers of darkness. When temptations and trials rush in upon us, let us go to God, and agonize with Him in prayer. He will not turn us away empty, but will give us grace and strength to overcome, and to break the power of the enemy. Oh, that all could see these things in their true light, and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus! Then would Israel move forward, strong in God, and in the power of His might. {CET 103}

Take unto you the whole armor of God, and never forget the gospel shoes of peace. Go not to any man with a heavy tread or with anger in your voice. Let all God's servants, from those occupying the highest positions, to those in the lowliest service, walk humbly before Him.--Manuscript 140, 1902. {ChL 11.1}

God's soldiers must put on the whole armor of God. We are not required to put on human armor, but to gird ourselves with God's strength. If we keep God's glory ever in view, our eyes will be anointed with the heavenly eye salve; we will be able to look deeper, and see afar off what the world is. As we discern its dishonesty, its craftiness, its selfish eye service, its pretense, and its boasting, its want of fair honest dealing in the ordinary intercourse of life, and its grasping covetousness, we can take our stand, by precept and example, to represent Christ, and convert souls from the world by our sound principles, our firm integrity, our hatred of all dissembling, and our holy boldness in acknowledging Christ.--Letter 4, 1896, pp. 13, 15, 16 (July 1, 1896 to Men in Responsible Positions). {ChL 24.3}

14. The Christian Communion and Conduct

Biblical material: *Ps. 119:9, 11; Mark 13:33; Eph. 6:17-24; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:8.*

Quotes:

- Though the gracious soul still desires more of God, it never desires more than God. *Matthew Henry*
- If we are weak in communion with God we are weak everywhere. *C.H. Spurgeon*
- It is not sufficient to commune with the truth, for truth is impersonal. We must commune with the God of truth. *W.G.T. Shedd*

Questions

Why do we need to pray? Doesn't God already know everything? How does prayer affect our daily life? Can prayer become a substitute for action, and how can we make sure that our lives are truly Christian with the right "communion and conduct"? How do our experiences and responses play into the whole great scheme of things in the cosmic conflict?

Discussion

One line that stands out is "Keep on praying." How often do we forget this simple yet elementary aspect of the Christian life! Yet we mostly do not know how to pray. Like the disciples we ask, "Teach us to pray," and then end up reciting the Lord's Prayer—which was a model, nor a formula.

Prayer is an expression of God's gift of freedom. God does not force, he waits to be asked. Not as some legal requirement, but because He will never cross the line of compulsion. He invites, he pleads, he waits—for us to come to Him and ask for the limitless gifts He wants to give. In a sense, it's part of the "rules of engagement" God has set for himself. He will not compel us, nor invade our privacy by forcibly entering into our minds unasked, but as we choose a living connection with God, then he is able to do so much more.

Paul spells out again aspects of Christian conduct—he does not want his letter to be a theoretical treatise, but something very practical. He mentions Tychicus, presumably the letter-bearer, with a very endearing personal tribute. Although Paul clearly will miss his companion, he sends him so that the church may be encouraged.

Why do you think Paul asked twice for prayer specifically for himself? He seems so often very self-assured and confident. Could it be that he was fearful at times, that he had doubts, that he was also unsure in some ways? Thinking of his present circumstance (in prison) makes it easier to recognize his very human feelings and the necessity for the request.

He concludes his letter with peace and faith, grace and love. This is such a far cry from the militant, aggressive, and combatant Saul he once was. Paul has come to realize that God does not work through force and compulsion, that what God most wants is willing acceptance of truth and right from his children who love him for all the best reasons.

Ephesians is all about understanding God as he is and rightly responding. The issues of unity and external behavior come only from the truth of the message and mission, not the other way around. It is important for us today to also recognize that we cannot legislate correct behavior or doctrinalize truth. First there must be truth in the inner being, truth that is established by evidence, so that we can then truly trust our trustworthy God. All else is external illusion, and has no lasting basis. Like Paul, we wish grace to all who love Jesus with an undying love.

Comment

Harvard researchers have stopped light dead in its tracks. More than that—they have stopped light and then started it again!

The speed that light travels—186,000 miles every second—is believed to be the fastest anything can travel in the universe, so to have light slowed down and stopped is a major surprise. Two independent teams of scientists worked with lasers in sodium vapor cooled close to absolute zero. Normally this vapor is opaque—it doesn't let light through. But by passing light from a coupling laser it becomes transparent. While the vapor was transparent, the researchers fired a pulse of light through—and then turned off the coupling laser so the vapor turned dark. The light beam stopped inside.

When the coupling laser was turned on again, out came the light beam! It was as if the pulse of light was frozen in time inside the vapor, only to emerge again once allowed to do so.

This amazing development may have immense implications for computer and communication technology. But what is more striking is the very fact that light can be stopped and started, something never believed possible before.

Just because we think something is impossible does not make it so. We do well to remember this when we are confronted with assertions such as: Prayer cannot travel faster than the speed of light. The sun could never have stood still in the time of Joshua. The sundial could not go backwards for Hezekiah. God could not have made the world in six days. God cannot heal my brokenness. God couldn't save me. God cannot be as good as he says, can he?

Ellen White Comments

“Let us not love in word,” the apostle writes, “but in deed and in truth.” The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within. It is the atmosphere of this love surrounding the soul of the believer that makes him a savour of life unto life and enables God to bless his work.

Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another—this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. “We love Him, because He first loved us.” In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around. {AA 551}

When Christians appear as gloomy and depressed as though they thought themselves friendless, they give a wrong impression of religion. In some cases the idea has been entertained that cheerfulness is inconsistent with the dignity of the Christian character, but this is a mistake. Heaven is all joy; and if we gather to our souls the joys of heaven and, as far as possible, express them in our words and deportment, we shall be more pleasing to our heavenly Father than if we were gloomy and sad. {AH 430}

Jesus lived a life of prayer; after toiling all day, preaching to the ignorant, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, feeding the multitudes, evening after evening He went away from the confusion of the city, and in some retired place, poured forth supplication to his Father with strong crying and tears....If the Saviour of men felt the need of prayer in our behalf, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of prayer—fervent, constant prayer—on their own account! [Bible Echo and Signs of the Times, 02-01-93]

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