

'WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?'

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night:
if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

ACTIVE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Recently, as I reread a statement from the Spirit of Prophecy, I was impressed with a thought that I had never noted before. The statement is conditional and involves the reception of the Latter Rain. In times past when I read the statement, I would emphasize the "reception" part of the quotation, and pass lightly over the condition. In so doing, I missed an important adjective. Here is the quotation:

Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the *active* Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.¹

There is much emphasis placed on the *passive* Christian virtues - "gentleness, patience, meekness, and kindness."² But the quotation from Testimonies to Ministers does *not* say that unless we are daily advancing in gentleness, patience, and kindness, we will be unable to recognize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "These graces are essential;" but unless we are daily advancing in "courage, force, energy, and perseverance"³ - the active Christian virtues - we shall not recognize, nor receive the precious gift so necessary for the ripening of the final harvest of earth.

What will the active Christian virtues do for us? We will "possess the courage of a hero to resist evil." There will be seen in our character "an indomitableness that cannot be molded or subdued by adverse circumstances." We will have a "moral backbone, an integrity that cannot be flattered, bribed, or terrified."⁴

Here are some strong words and phrases - "indomitableness", moral backbone", and "courage of a hero to resist evil." The world and the nominal Adventist would call the possessor of these traits, stubborn, stiff-necked, and strait-laced. They would fault them as un-Christlike. But remember the Bible states that the 144,000 are without fault before the throne of God,⁵ not the tribunal of human judgment!

A hero to resist evil does not stand idly by, letting things take place as if he didn't see. Neither does a hero pass by on the other side, so that he need not give an accounting of existing evil. A hero becomes involved; he refuses to remain silent. He will not be flattered into silence by invitations of participation with the establishment when it is pursuing a wrong course. He will not be bribed by recognition of his own projects and institutions, nor will he be terrified by threats of what men will do to him, if he doesn't do thus and so. *Only* such a hero will recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain!

This hero-courage to deal with sin is two-fold. It involves the seal of God being placed in the forehead, which is another way to state that the individual will recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Observe who will be left without the seal of God:

The class who do not feel grieved over their *own* spiritual declension, nor mourn over the sins of *others*, will be left without the seal of God.⁶

Carefully, and honestly, we need to deal with ourselves, examining first whether we be in the faith or not; and whether that which we permit ourselves to eat, drink, wear, and do, is in harmony with that faith. Note carefully this counsel:

While Christ is cleansing the sanctuary, the worshipers on earth should carefully review their life, and compare their character with the standard of righteousness. As they see their defects, they should seek the aid of the Spirit of God to enable them to

have moral strength to resist the temptations of Satan, and reach the perfection of the standard. They may be victors over the very temptations which seemed to strong for humanity to bear; for the divine power will be combined with their human effort, and Satan cannot overcome them.⁷

But there is another phase! What does it mean to mourn over the sins of others? It means a "soul anguish", that is "expressed in lamentation and weeping, reproofs and warnings." It means to "mourn before God to see religion despised in the very homes of those who have had great light." It means to lament and afflict one's soul "because pride, avarice, selfishness, and deception of almost every kind are in the church."⁸ At this point many stop, and feel that because they are concerned with the conditions as they exist in the church, their duty is complete. They flatter themselves that because they are not of the group who proclaim - "All is well; we are progressing on all fronts" - that all is well with them. But more is required of a hero than this! While sighing and mourning he will also hold "forth the words of life"; he will reprove, counsel, and entreat.⁹ God's true servants must never, never forget that "the seal of God will be placed upon the foreheads of those *only* who sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land."¹⁰ [The phrase - "in the land" is interpreted to mean "in the church" by cross reference.¹¹]

What we need to understand is simply that unless the passive Christian virtues are strengthened by the active virtues, we will be only milkie-toast Seventh-day Adventists moulded and influenced by the permissiveness of the world, and deceived by the compromising suggestions of the nominal adherents to the Truth within the church.

Consider Moses, the man whom God knew face to face. The Scriptures declare that he was the meekest man on the earth,¹² yet he possessed an integrity that could not be bribed, flattered or terrified. We, in our finite judgment, equate "meekness" with the personality of Aaron, who "with his amiable disposition" was

"so very mild and pleasing."¹³ Aaron did not appreciate Moses's approach to problems, nor his forthright type of leadership. Aaron thought "that Moses had been too unyielding to the wishes of the people. He thought that if Moses had been less firm, less decided at times, and that if he had made a compromise with the people, and gratified their wishes, he would have had less trouble, and there would have been more peace and harmony in the camp of Israel."¹⁴

Even the children of Israel came to view things as Aaron saw them. They did not believe that Moses

was . . . the right kind of man. He was too unyielding, and kept their sins continually before them, warning, reproof, and threatening them with God's displeasure. . . They thought, If Moses had only been as amiable and mild as Aaron, what peace and harmony would have prevailed in the camp of Israel!¹⁵

Human nature has not changed with time. Today, as in the case of Israel and the Golden Calf, "many professed Christians look upon men who do not reprove and condemn wrong, as men of piety and Christians indeed, while they think that those who stand boldly in defense of the right, and will not yield their integrity to unconsecrated influences, lack piety and a Christian spirit."¹⁶

The daily advancement in the active Christian virtues will not be easy. The struggle will be difficult; but the results well worth the effort. Ponder long on this paragraph:

Those who stand in defense of the honor of God, and maintain the purity of truth at any cost, will have manifold trials, as did our Saviour in the wilderness of temptation. While those who have yielding temperaments, who have not courage to condemn wrong, but keep silent when their influence is needed to stand in defense of the right against any pressure, may avoid many heart-aches and escape many perplexities, they will also lose a very rich reward, *if not their own souls*. Those who are in harmony with God, and who through faith in Him receive strength to resist wrong and stand in defense of right, will always have severe conflicts, and will frequently have to stand almost alone. But precious victories will be theirs while they make God their dependence. His grace will be their strength. Their moral sensibility will be keen and clear, and their moral powers will be able to withstand wrong influences.

Their integrity, like that of Moses, will be of the purest character. ¹⁷

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- ¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 507
 - ²Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 497
 - ³Ibid.
 - ⁴Ibid., p. 498
 - ⁵Revelation 14:5
 - ⁶Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 5, p. 211
 - ⁷Ellen G. White, "Constant Improvement Required", Review and Herald,
April 8, 1890.
 - ⁸Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 5, p. 210
 - ⁹Ibid.,
 - ¹⁰Ibid., p. 212
 - ¹¹Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 267
 - ¹²Numbers 12:3
 - ¹³Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 3, p. 298
 - ¹⁴Ibid., pp. 298-299
 - ¹⁵Ibid., p. 300
 - ¹⁶Ibid., p. 302
 - ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 302-303

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Note: With this Thought Paper, we conclude for the present, the study of the responsibility of the people of God as they face the trends within the church. The Thought Paper for October will begin a discussion of certain doctrinal areas involved in the preparation for the close of human probation. It will be entitled, "Fundamental Adventism - IA".