

Lesson 4
Saturday, July 18
Sin in the Church

Paul felt that the Lord's requirements must be obeyed, His judgments avoided. Like Paul, we must make every effort to obtain the crown of life, which brings eternal honor to every victor. We must not be content to live useless lives. What is humility? That sense of sin and unworthiness which leads to repentance. But we must be assured of the malignity of a disease before we feel our need of a cure. Those who do not realize the sinfulness of sin are not able to appreciate the value of the atonement and the necessity of being cleansed from all sin. The sinner measures himself by himself and by those who like himself are sinners. He does not look at the purity and holiness of Christ. But when the law of God brings conviction to his heart, he says with Paul, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Romans 7:9). . . .

God created man for His glory. He will not, cannot endure the presence of sin in His dominion. If there are in the church those who are willfully sinning against God, every possible means should be used to bring them to repentance. If this is not done, God's name is dishonored. He is too pure to look upon iniquity with favor. . . .

Adam's sin would be regarded by the churches of today as a simple mistake, to be at once forgiven and no more thought of. But God's standard is high and His word immutable, and all selfish, covetous practices are an abomination in His sight. The hearts of believers need to be purified, sanctified, refined, ennobled. . . .

Look up, my brethren. Has the gospel lost its power to impress hearts? Is it because the regenerating influence of the Spirit of Christ has died away that hearts are not purified, sanctified, and prepared for the Holy Spirit? No; the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of the living God, is with us yet; but it must be wielded with earnestness. Let us use it as did God's sanctified ones of old. By its living, quickening power it will cut its way to hearts. . . .

The Lord calls for a reformation all through our ranks. . . . When the church is awakened, decided changes will be made. Men and women will be converted, and so filled will they be by the Spirit of God that they will pass from country to country, from city to city, proclaiming the message of truth. With hearts filled with earnest love for souls, they will open their Bibles and present the Word. —*Our Father Cares*, p. 286.

Sunday, July 19

Dissonance Between Faith and Practice

The Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul. The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ. Only those who are thus taught of God, those who possess the inward working of the Spirit, and in whose life the Christ-life is manifested, are to stand as representatives, to minister in behalf of the church.

"Whosoever sins ye remit," said Christ, "they are remitted; . . . and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Christ here gives no liberty for anyone to pass judgment upon others. In the Sermon on the Mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God. But on the church in its organized capacity He places a responsibility for the individual members. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," the Lord says, "with all long-suffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2.) Deal faithfully with wrongdoing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:21.) If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God's word is pronounced upon them in heaven. In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. Anyone who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself.

But there is a brighter side to the picture. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted." Let this thought be kept uppermost. In labor for the erring, let every eye be directed to Christ. . . .

Let the repentance of the sinner be accepted by the church with grateful hearts. Let the repenting one be led out from the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith and righteousness. Let his trembling hand be placed in the loving hand of Jesus. Such a remission is ratified in heaven. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 805, 806.

The history of Achan teaches the solemn lesson that for one man's sin the displeasure of God will rest upon a people or a nation till the transgression is searched out and punished. Sin is corrupting in its nature. One man infected with its deadly leprosy may communicate the taint to thousands. . . . Many dare not condemn iniquity, lest they shall thereby sacrifice position or popularity. And by some it is considered uncharitable to rebuke sin. The servant of God. . . is under the most solemn obligation to present the Word of God, without fear or favor. He must call sin by its right name. . . .

The love of God will never lead to the belittling of sin; it will never cover or excuse an unconfessed wrong. Achan learned too late that God's law, like its Author, is unchanging. It has to do with all our acts and thoughts and feelings. It follows us, and reaches every secret spring of action. By indulgence in sin, men are led to lightly regard the law of God. Many conceal their transgressions from their fellow men, and flatter themselves that God will not be strict to mark iniquity. But His law is the great standard of right, and with it every act of life must be compared in that day when God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. Purity of heart will lead to purity of life. All excuses for sin are vain. Who can plead for the sinner when God testifies against him? —*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 214.

God invites us to come to Him with our burden of guilt and our heart sorrows. Sin fills us with fear of God. When we have sinned we try to hide ourselves from Him. But whatever our sin, God bids us come unto Him through Jesus Christ. It is only by taking our sins to God that we can be freed from them. Cain, under the rebuke of God, acknowledged his guilt in killing Abel, but he fled away from God, as if he could thus escape from his sin. Had he fled to God with his burden of guilt he would have been forgiven. The prodigal son, realizing his guilt and wretchedness, said, "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18). He confessed his sin and was taken back to his father's heart.

If we would offer acceptable prayer, there is a work to be done in confessing our sins to one another. If I have sinned against my neighbor in word or action I should make confession to him. If he has wronged me he should confess to me. So far as is possible the one who has wronged another is to make restitution. Then in contrition he is to confess the sin to God, whose law has been transgressed. In sinning against our brother, we sin against God, and we must seek pardon from Him. Whatever our sin, if we but repent and believe in the atoning blood of Christ we shall be pardoned. . . . We have only one channel of approach to God. Our prayers can come to Him through one name only—that of the Lord Jesus, our advocate.

Christ is represented as stooping from His throne and bending earthward to send help to every needy soul who asks Him in faith. —*That I May Know Him*, p. 260.

Christ's instruction as to the treatment of the erring repeats in more specific form the teaching given to Israel through Moses: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbor, that thou bear not sin for him." (Leviticus 19:17, margin.) That is, if others neglect the duty Christ has enjoined, of trying to restore those who are in error and sin, they become partakers in the sin. For evils that we might have checked, we are just as responsible as if we were guilty of the acts ourselves.

But it is to the wrongdoer himself that we are to present the wrong. We are not to make it a matter of comment and criticism among ourselves; nor even after it is told to the church, are we at liberty to repeat it to others. A knowledge of the faults of Christians will be only a cause of stumbling to the unbelieving world; and by dwelling upon these things, we ourselves can receive only harm; for it is by beholding that we become changed. While we seek to correct the errors of others, the Spirit of Christ will lead us to shield them, as far as possible, from the criticism of even their own brethren, and how much more from the censure of the unbelieving world. We ourselves are erring, and need Christ's pity and forgiveness, and just as we wish Him to deal with us, He bids us deal with one another. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 441.

Tuesday, July 21
Protecting the Church's Identity

In every respect you are to honor God by being partakers of His divine nature that you may have the assurance of sins pardoned which would testify of the love of God. But there is not in our experience that pleasantness and joyousness that there should be. Christ says that if He is in us, our joy will be full. Let us then be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Let us not, by living inconsistent, earthly, sensual lives, heap reproach upon Christ. Let us rise above the malarious atmosphere that pervades the world, and breathe the breath of God. Let us feed upon the bread of life.

Christ declares that if we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we shall have eternal life. His word will be to us as the leaves of the tree of life if we will believe in Christ as our personal Saviour. If we eat the bread that came down from heaven, we shall have a live connection with God. We shall bring eternity into our reckoning. We shall live as in the presence of the whole heavenly host. The angels are watching and guarding us.

God loves us, but we fail to cherish that love. We are losing in spirituality. God wants us to recognize His ownership in every human being. He has His claims. They are mine, He says. I have bought them with a price. "Ye are not your own. . . . Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Will you do this? Will you pray in faith? Will you honor Christ by taking Him at His word? —*Lift Him Up*, p. 109.

I have been thinking how little we appreciate the decided declaration of the Word of God to us in regard to our relation with each other. There is that selfishness in the human heart that centers our thoughts upon ourselves; and even [in] those who seem to have a connection with God, we are pained sometimes to see how much of their thoughts are centered upon themselves, not seeing nor sensing the needs of others. We are connected together as in the great web of humanity, and in all our associations with one another we should seek to have the mind of Christ. To close the eyes to the needy and perishing, to leave sinners unwarned, and by indifference and selfishness tempt them to say, "No man careth for my soul," is to dishonor God and bring reproach upon the cause of God. Our work is to build up one another in the most holy faith.

If there is not that perfect harmony existing between us, we should not feel that we ourselves are not at all to blame in the matter. If another's thoughts and feelings are not in the same channel as our own, we should not feel that they are all wrong and we are right. We want to constantly keep the mind at the right point, to answer the prayer of Christ in John 17:21–23. We want to know what is the yoke Christ bids us take and the burdens we are to carry at this time, and constantly seek in kindness and love to show our brother that we have an interest in him, and bring love into our actions day by day. This is the gold tried in the fire—faith and love. If we see one in error on any point we should not pass along and say nothing, but we must try to bring him out from darkness into light. We must guard each other's interests as we do our own. We do not value the soul as we should. We ought to be united in one great brotherhood and be in that place where we can bear with the faults of one another with all longsuffering and meekness, and seek to bear one another's burdens. (See Ephesians 5:1, 2.) —*This Day With God*, p. 274.

Wednesday, July 22

Antidote Against Sexual Immorality

This message concerns all our churches. You can never employ your faculty of hearing better than in hearkening to hear what the voice of God speaks to you in His Word. There is a rich and abundant promise to those who overcome. It is not enough to enter upon this warfare, we must pursue it to the end. We must know nothing of yielding. We must fight the good fight of faith to the very end. To the overcomer is promised the triumphal victory. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Whatever was lost in the fall of Adam is more than restored in redemption. He that sitteth on the throne saith, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

Let us look closely and critically to ourselves. Are not the vows we entered into at our baptism violated? Are we dead to the world and alive unto Christ? Are we seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God? Is the cable cut which anchored us to the eternal Rock? Are we drifting with the current to perdition? Shall we make no effort to press and urge our passage upstream? Let us not hesitate longer, but vigorously apply the oars; and let us do our first works ere we make hopeless shipwreck.

It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love. Is it worldliness? Is it selfishness? Is it the love of self-esteem? Is it striving to be first? Is it the sin of sensuality that is intensely active? Is it the sin of the Nicolaitans, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness? Is it the misuse and abuse of great light and opportunities and privileges, making boasted claims to wisdom and religious knowledge, while the life and character are inconsistent and immoral? Whatever it is that has been petted and cultivated until it has become strong and overmastering, make determined efforts to overcome, else you will be lost. —*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 361.

I have been shown that we live amid the perils of the last days. Because iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold. The word "many" refers to the professed followers of Christ. They are affected by the prevailing iniquity and backslide from God, but it is not necessary that they should be thus affected. The cause of this declension is that they do not stand clear from this iniquity. The fact that their love to God is waxing cold because iniquity abounds shows that they are, in some sense, partakers in this iniquity, or it would not affect their love for God and their zeal and fervor in His cause.

A terrible picture of the condition of the world has been presented before me. Immorality abounds everywhere. Licentiousness is the special sin of this age. Never did vice lift its deformed head with such boldness as now. The people seem to be benumbed, and the lovers of virtue and true goodness are nearly discouraged by its boldness, strength, and prevalence. The iniquity which abounds is not merely confined to the unbeliever and the scoffer. Would that this were the case, but it is not. . . .

Every Christian will have to learn to restrain his passions and be controlled by principle. . . .

God has given you a habitation to care for and preserve in the best condition for His service and glory. —*Reflecting Christ*, p. 150.

If those who are contemplating marriage would not have miserable, unhappy reflections after marriage, they must make it a subject of serious, earnest reflection now. This step taken unwisely is one of the most effective means of ruining the usefulness of young men and women. Life becomes a burden, a curse. No one can so effectually ruin a woman's happiness and usefulness, and make life a heartsickening burden, as her own husband; and no one can do one hundredth part as much to chill the hopes and aspirations of a man, to paralyze his energies and ruin his influence and prospects, as his own wife. It is from the marriage hour that many men and women date their success or failure in this life, and their hopes of the future life.

I wish I could make the youth see and feel their danger, especially the danger of making unhappy marriages.

Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life both in this world and in the world to come. A sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that God must choose for him. We are not to please ourselves, for Christ pleased not Himself. I would not be understood to mean that anyone is to marry one whom he does not love. This would be sin. But fancy and the emotional nature must not be allowed to lead on to ruin. God requires the whole heart, the supreme affections. —*The Adventist Home*, p. 43.

What ought every Christian to do when brought into the trying position which tests the soundness of religious principle? With a firmness worthy of imitation he should say frankly: "I am a conscientious Christian. I believe the seventh day of the week to be the Sabbath of the Bible. Our faith and principles are such that they lead in opposite directions. We cannot be happy together, for if I follow on to gain a more perfect knowledge of the will of God, I shall become more and more unlike the world and assimilated to the likeness of Christ. If you continue to see no loveliness in Christ, no attractions in the truth, you will love the world, which I cannot love, while I shall love the things of God, which you cannot love. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Without spiritual discernment you will be unable to see the claims of God upon me, or to realize my obligations to the Master whom I serve; therefore you will feel that I neglect you for religious duties. You will not be happy; you will be jealous on account of the affections which I give to God, and I shall be alone in my religious belief. When your views shall change, when your heart shall respond to the claims of God, and you shall learn to love my Saviour, then our relationship may be renewed."

The believer thus makes a sacrifice for Christ which his conscience approves, and which shows that he values eternal life too highly to run the risk of losing it. He feels that it would be better to remain unmarried than to link his interest for life with one who chooses the world rather than Jesus, and who would lead away from the cross of Christ. —*Counsels for the Church*, pp. 122, 123.

Friday, July 24
For Further Reading

The Faith I Live By, "Builders, Not Destroyers," October 26, p. 305.

Reflecting Christ, "All to Reveal Christ's Spirit and Power," January 18, p. 32.