

Evangelism (Part 1)

This week, we are beginning our study of Ellen White's book, *Evangelism*. I believe that this will be a valuable exercise for us, as was most of our examination of *Lessons on Faith* by Jones and Waggoner. These pioneer works are full of light that, as we have seen several times, would have prevented the mainstream Adventist Church from falling into many errors, had that light been embraced and maintained.

We saw, for example, in the works of Jones and Waggoner, clear passages describing the Victory over Sin precisely as we teach it today. We see descriptions of sanctification given just as we would in this last generation. We see a disdain for the idea of utilizing the state authorities as a defense for Church matters that we wholeheartedly advocate. In short, the writings of Adventist pioneers describe a faith that, today, goes by the name "Creation Seventh Day Adventism." Further, this is a faith that is not shared among many groups, or even many people within the larger Adventist community, but it is unique to the "little company," to the remnant that has rejected the influence of the world and Satan upon its beliefs and its practices.

As I said, then, these works are valuable tools to help us to learn the principles of Scripture. We are not taking any of these works as a substitute for the Bible – but then again, we understand that even the Bible itself is but a tool to instruct us in righteous principles. The important thing is not to memorize verses, (for many great deceivers were known for being able to quote extensively from the Scriptures) but to become familiar with the character of the Author.

Few activities draw us closer to Christ than that of Evangelism. Evangelism is the act that most perfectly fulfills the great commission, the instruction that Christ gave to His people, to teach the Gospel to every creature, and to draw them into a covenant relationship with the Father and the Son. In Evangelism the messenger loses sight of "self," and becomes entirely invested in the well-being of another, his hearers. This is a manifestation of Agape, of divine love, and it refines the character of the speaker, as well as those of the hearers.

The Book *Evangelism* was created as a compilation of quotes from Mrs. White, drawn from various other works. As a rule, I am not a fan of these compilations, for they tend to remove valuable context from isolated statements – nevertheless, proper studies can be done using them as a basis... provided that we do not merely give quote after quote without speaking from the heart, or explaining what the Spirit is saying to us through these messages.

Let us begin with this examination, and see what the Spirit will say to us through these inspired words.

I am beginning right at the first chapter, skipping the preface and other sections that are not actually a part of the book's contents. The first division is called "The Challenge to Evangelism," and the first subsection of that is called "Proclaiming The Message." For the sake of readability, I will also not be including the editor-inserted "headers" that precede each paragraph. Some of them are useful, but others are not, and eliminating them will help us to focus on the actual contents of the writings.

[quote]

Christ's last words to His disciples were: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." Go to the farthest bounds of the habitable globe, and know that wherever you go My presence will attend you....

To us also the commission is given. We are bidden to go forth as Christ's messengers, to teach, instruct, and persuade men and women, to urge upon their attention the word of life. And to us also the assurance of Christ's abiding presence is given. Whatever the difficulties with which we may have to contend, whatever the trials we may have to endure, the gracious promise is always ours, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." [Manuscript 24]

[endquote]

Last New Moon a member, I think it was Jody, shared a quote that was something to the effect that every instruction from Yah is a promise that we are able to accomplish it. This is one of the cornerstones of the CSDA faith. Nothing that is asked of us is impossible, because our Father is just, and further, He has purposed to work His miracles upon the earth through us.

No statement that we see in the Bible, whether it is to cease from sin as individuals, or to enlighten the whole earth as a collective people, is too much for us to accomplish. We may not be able to see precisely how to perform these acts. We may not see the availability of the resources to accomplish them. Nevertheless, if we set foot in the Jordan, as the Ark-bearers did during the journey to the promised land, we will see the waters part before us. The important thing is to "step out" in faith, and make a start. If anyone present here today, or who receives these transcripts after the meetings, has not yet stepped into the new life that Christ has for us, through the new birth, I encourage you to take these words to heart. It takes belief, willingness, and then a step. Christ Himself does the work in us to accomplish the victorious life... but we must choose to make that first step, and to say, "I receive this gift."

Whether individually or collectively, these little acts of obedience will pave the way for greater and greater works, until eventually it will appear that we are creating just as our Father did, who made all things out of nothing.

So, here we see the instruction given from Christ, to teach, instruct and persuade. We see the command to convince a hard-hearted world of the miracles of Yah's love. This is just as "impossible" as walking on water, or feeding several thousand people with a couple of baskets of food. Yet our Master has done these things, and in both these cases He has invited His followers to participate in doing these things. Yahshua Himself has taught the entire world, for there is not a country that has not heard of His life, death and resurrection. And yet, He sends us to instruct, and to convince, of the proper meaning of these things for those who will receive this report as good news. We are told there will be difficulties, but we are also told that Yahshua is with us in the trials, and His grace is sufficient for us.

[quote]

"In the commission to His disciples, Christ not only outlined their work but gave them their message. Teach the people, He said, "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught. That which He had spoken, not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is here included. Human teachings is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by

ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ's servants to teach. "The law and the prophets," with the record of His own words and deeds, are the treasure committed to the disciples to be given to the world....

The gospel is to be presented, not as a lifeless theory, but as a living force to change the life. God desires that the receivers of His grace shall be witnesses to its power. [The Desire of Ages, 826]

[endquote]

As I read this paragraph, something came to my mind. We see written here, "There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation." In the work of the Gospel, and in the business of those who bear it, it is to be Christ, and Him alone, who directs the course of the Church. Specifically mentioned are man's conclusions, and human-based church legislation.

What this means, then, is that for the true Church, it is Yah who must direct each collective action of the Body. Now, for some of you, especially those of you who are familiar with the current "legal" situation with the Church, this is "the obvious" that I am stating, and yet consider what the mainstream Adventist Church believes. They believe they are the true Church of Christ.. and that part is fine, every Church should believe that. They also believe (at least those in authoritative positions believe) that it was the proper course of action to bring lawsuits against individuals that has resulted in their imprisonment and suffering. But, if they believe that they are the Remnant Church of God, they must believe as a matter of course that He is the one directing these actions.

In other words, God is not only "okay" with these legal actions – although He explicitly forbade them just a generation before – but He is also directly responsible for them. He instructed the Church leaders to do the things that they have done, if they are going to be consistent in their beliefs, and therefore He wanted men, women and youths imprisoned for calling themselves "Seventh-day Adventist" Christians.

This doesn't seem like the God of the Bible. This doesn't seem like the Father of Christ. This does not seem like the character of Christ Himself. There are still some, according to emails I have read recently, that are in the "valley of decision" between the SDA Church and the CSDA message. There are still some who believe that there is value in remaining in the covenant espoused by the General Conference Corporation. But, to be very direct, if anyone accepts the God of the mainstream Adventist Church, and worships Him, then this is the God that they will be sharing with the world through their evangelism. This is the message that they are presenting to the world as "good news." This is the character which they are seeking to emulate (and some whom we have met seem to have already perfected this vicious, agitated spirit).

As the quote above says, the Gospel is not to be presented as a "lifeless theory." But today, many years after Ellen White wrote that statement, even worse is being done under the guise of the Gospel. The gospel is a financially valuable commodity that must be protected by force of arms. The gospel is property, to be defended by "man's theories and conclusions." If this is true, then either the Gospel has changed, or the nature of the messengers has changed.

But I believe that the Gospel does not change, for it is a reflection of our Father, who is eternal. It is the power of Yah unto salvation, and it must be presented as such, and by a people who respect it as such.

But now, look at this... we have only seen two or three paragraphs, and already we can see the fullness of the Creation Seventh Day Adventist message presented. We see victory, we see purity of doctrine, and we see a way to identify the "beast," the work of Satan through human agents. Only inspiration can work in this way.

[quote]

We are now living in the closing scenes of this world's history. Let men tremble with the sense of the responsibility of knowing the truth. The ends of the world are come. Proper consideration of these things will lead all to make an entire consecration of all that they have and are to their God....

The weighty obligation of warning a world of its coming doom is upon us. From every direction, far and near, calls are coming to us for help. The church, devotedly consecrated to the work, is to carry the message to the world: Come to the gospel feast; the supper is prepared, come.... Crowns, immortal crowns, are to be won. The kingdom of heaven is to be gained. A world, perishing in sin, is to be enlightened. The lost pearl is to be found. The lost sheep is to be brought back in safety to the fold. Who will join in the search? Who will bear the light to those who are wandering in the darkness of error? [The Review and Herald, July 23, 1895]

[endquote]

I remember a few feasts ago, one that I attended in Guys, TN. We were sitting in the room just outside the Sanctuary, a circle of us, having just completed some heart-work. We were considering the work ahead of us, and I said, "There have been 6000 years of history, 6000 years of Yah reaching out to fallen man, to restore him to his rightful place before the Throne, and it all comes down to the few of us that are in this room."

I saw the looks on the faces of some who had considered the situation in this manner for the first time, and I am reminded of that event by the statement "Let men tremble with the sense of the responsibility of knowing the truth." Ours is a great and terrible responsibility. It is a "weighty obligation," a heavy load, and were we to attempt to bear it in our mortal strength, it would press us into the ground. The only way we could "survive" the burden would be to throw it off, to cast it off... and we have seen some who have studied with us for a time do precisely that. When they came to understand the work of love, the work of bringing this life-saving truth to others, the cost has seemed too high. Those who attempt to be "good Christians" without Christ truly dwelling within them will not last very long as load-bearers. They cannot... this was never meant for mortal shoulders.

Christ alone can carry the weight of the world... and we offer ourselves for a time, a brief time by the earth's standards, so that He can carry it through us.

In this last generation, I would word some of the above a little more powerfully. I would say, "The earth is being enlightened," for the Fourth Angel gives its cry even now. I would say, "The lost pearl is found," and the crowns are won. Who will come and rest with us in the knowledge of these things? Who will come and share the joy of Christ's victory? It is an active rest, it is resting in doing, peace in process, but this is the true Sabbath we are offered.

Yah searches the earth for those who will help us to carry this light to the world. Our work is to make ourselves available, so that they may unite with us, and bring their talents to bear on finishing the task.

[quote]

We should now feel the responsibility of laboring with intense earnestness to impart to others the truths that God has given for this time. We cannot be too much in earnest....

Now is the time for the last warning to be given. There is a special power in the presentation of the truth at the present time; but how long will it continue?—Only a little while. If there was ever a crisis, it is now. All are now deciding their eternal destiny. Men need to be aroused to realize the solemnity of the time, the nearness of the day when human probation shall be ended. Decided efforts should be made to bring the message for this time prominently before the people. The third angel is to go forth with great power. [Testimonies For The Church 6:16] (1900)

[endquote]

I like this statement very much. There is a “special power” in the presentation of the truth in times of urgency. Christ’s Spirit adds power to our words. We do not let ourselves become discouraged, ever, from speaking the truth in love, for Satan will try to convince us to be silent, saying (in our own voices), “I am not sure of my words,” or “I have not learned enough of the message yet,” or “I am unskillful with words” (as Moses said). If we were supposed to create a message, and figure out how to deliver it, then we would have a reason to be concerned...

But we are bearing Christ’s testimony in ourselves. We are bringing His words to the people, and in His own spiritual voice. It will sound like our words, and seem like our speech, but consider: had we not been drawn into Christ’s abiding power, we would not be speaking these words at all. They are His words, and the Holy Spirit will work on the hearers – whether we perceive it or not – to bring about conviction in all who are willing. We provide only the vessel, not the substance, of the Word.

But this is not to take away from the urgency that Mrs. White is describing here either. Being “only the vessel” does not remove from us any of the responsibility for the message that we bear. If we do not go out in faith to the people, the Spirit will not have a witness among them. As it is written, “How then shall they call on 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?” (Rom 10:14)

That statement is just as true now as it was when it was written. All of us are called to be evangelists, to be “preachers” of a sort. All of us have the responsibility of being willing vessels, bearing the Word to this last generation. All of us should feel responsible for being our brothers’ keepers, and to find ways to reach out to others, and to support those who are doing the same. This is the compulsion of Agape love. Let us therefore depend upon that “special power.” Let us look for times and ways to let that power, the Holy Spirit, move through us to those who must – as a matter of everlasting life and death – have their consciences encounter Yah’s love.

Finally, let me end with this very appropriate quote. It seems this book is going to take us quite a while to go through, and praise Yah, for there is quite a lot to learn from this work:

[quote]

Evangelistic work, opening the Scriptures to others, warning men and women of what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God's servants. [The Review and Herald, August 2, 1906]

[endquote]

This is certainly proving to be true. Even before the feast, there was a general consensus among us that evangelism was going to take more and more of a central role for all of us. And yet, ironically, the need to press forward with evangelism has also highlighted "gaps" in our individual understandings. At the last feast, I heard that one of the major themes was the need for more personal Bible study, prayer time, and a more vital devotional life. These things are necessary for the evangelist to do his or her work properly. Even if one is a good speaker, a good writer, a skillful presenter, it is the power of these little, personal things that ultimately determine the long-term effects of the work, and the destiny of the worker.

We must therefore give our whole selves to the work, to preparing ourselves individually, being evangelists individually, preparing ourselves as a people, and engaging in work as a Church, for the glory of our Father in Heaven, and for the salvation of the souls of our fellow men.

Are there any questions or comments about the study tonight?