

Evangelism (Part 6)

A blessed and happy Sabbath to everyone. This week we continue our examination of Evangelism, by Ellen White, looking for three things in particular: the principles of the Christian life as expressed through this most central Gospel activity, the applications of those principles to both our work as a Church and our personal spiritual growth, and the elements of the character of Yah that are revealed through His servants' words and actions.

This week, we will be looking at three sections of the book, for they are relatively short and then followed by a longer portion. And so, we will cover all three of these, leaving the fourth, longer section until the next time.

We are still in the second major section of Evangelism, entitled "The Metropolitan Masses," and so we are looking at material that was geared toward the work (as envisioned by Ellen White) in the large cities of her day. As we have noted many times, things have changed dramatically since that time, both in terms of the spiritual condition of the world, and the ability of the Church's workers to seemingly need to be in several places at once. Because the work was not done as it ought to have been done in the days that would have been more favorable, we must contend now with circumstances far more forbidding than they need to have been. If there was need for daily prayers, and hourly prayers, to keep the Gospel workers safe in the days described in the pages we are reading through, what about now? We need prayers moment by moment, minute by minute, for the health, progress, and success of our workers. I would say, whenever you have a moment as you go about your daily activities, offer a prayer for our people. Give thanks to Yah, in those times, and ask for His blessing upon His children, and for those whom we are trying to reach in His name.

It is in this setting that we continue our study.

The three sections we will look at tonight are called, "The Call for A Speedy Work," "Special Opportunities for Evangelism," and "Surveying the Needs of Large Cities." They are brief, all of them, but worthy of thought and consideration.

In addition, I will be selecting some of the more diverse quotations from these sections, for they begin here to make mention of particular cities, and situations very specific to events that she addresses. While these are good for us all to go over individually – and I strongly encourage you to spend some time reading them – for there are vital principles present in all, we will not be covering every single quote here.

We begin, then, with the first quote from the first section:

[quote]

The message that I am bidden to bear to our people at this time is, Work the cities without delay, for time is short. The Lord has kept this work before us for the last twenty years or more. A little has been done in a few places, but much more might be done.—Letter 168, 1909.

[/quote]

The section begins, as several do, with an immediate message about the urgency with which the work is to be conducted. Now, there is a difference, as many in the world need to learn, between "urgency" and

“haste.” Both indicate speed, but urgency is more of a state of mind, understanding that there is no room for delay, and haste implies a kind of carelessness that tends to cause mistakes. We must have speed and also wisdom, balanced and cooperating, in order to properly accomplish more work, in less time, and with fewer workers, than this quote intended.

[quote]

When I think of the many cities yet unwarned, I cannot rest. It is distressing to think that they have been neglected so long. For many, many years the cities of America, including the cities in the South, have been set before our people as places needing special attention. A few have borne the burden of working in these cities; but, in comparison with the great needs and the many opportunities, but little has been done. Where is your faith, my brethren? Where are the workmen?

Shall we not plan to send messengers all through these fields, and support them liberally? Shall not the ministers of God go into these crowded centers, and there lift up their voices in warning to multitudes? At such a time as this, every hand is to be employed.—The Review and Herald, November 25, 1909.

[/quote]

The principles here are perfectly constant and consistent. They are unchanging. All who can, must work toward the goal of winning souls, or souls will be lost. And really, ALL can. And for all that we do, it is with the motivation of demonstrating love for those who have not heard the message, or who might be convinced if they heard it expressed more than once, and in more ways than one. What required a miracle in that day requires a supreme miracle now, but nothing is too hard for Yah.

The next section is actually all one long quote, and it is encouraging the brethren to seek opportunities to present the truth at large gatherings like the St. Louis fair. I don't want to cover the entire quote, but a few paragraphs struck me as worthy of repeating here:

[quote]

When Christ was upon this earth, He took advantage of such opportunities. Wherever a large number of people was gathered for any purpose, His voice was heard, clear and distinct, giving His message. And as a result, after His crucifixion and ascension, thousands were converted in a day. The seed sown by Christ sank deep into hearts, and germinated, and when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the harvest was gathered in.

The disciples went forth and preached the word everywhere with such power that fear fell upon their opposers, and they dared not do that which they would have done had not the evidence been so plain that God was working.

At all such gatherings there should be present men whom God can use. Leaflets containing the light of present truth should be scattered among the people like the leaves of autumn. To many who attend these gatherings these leaflets would be as the leaves of the tree of life, which are for the healing of the nations.

The time has come when, as never before, Seventh-day Adventists are to arise and shine, because their light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon them.—Letter 296, 1904.

[/quote]

Here we see a wonderful opportunity for those who do not believe that they are called to stand up and address a crowd. They can distribute literature at places where people gather. Even if we do not see immediate results, acquainting a new set of eyes and ears with the truth is never really wasted, and Yah can use this in ways that we might not imagine to bring people closer to Yahshua.

Now that last paragraph, I must admit, I almost missed the blessing in it when reading through the chapter earlier today. Yah sent me back to it and had me read it again, and when I did, I could only say, “Amen!”

I love the way that the author has spoken about the glory of Yah. It is not some future thing. And even among those who did not do the work as they ought, she spoke by faith, and it was so – the glory of Yah HAS RISEN upon His people. It is a true thing, and a true thing now. The glory of Yah has risen upon us, as inspiration says. Now, just as we believe this, we will go forth and let others know.

[quote]

“We feel intensely regarding the work in our cities. There are few ready to engage in the work waiting to be done. There are people of all classes to be met; and the work is difficult. But we shall encourage all who have tact and the ability to understand the situation to give themselves to the work of sounding the last note of warning to the world.—Letter 82, 1910”

[/quote]

The phrase “all who have tact and the ability to understand the situation” has much meaning for us. We must not only know the truth, but we must speak in a way that the Scriptures describe as being “always with grace, seasoned with salt.” (Col 4:6) This is not an arbitrary instruction. The world must know us as a warm, loving people, who nevertheless are not afraid to call sin by its right name. There is a balance there that requires a deep and personal understanding of the truth.

Based on a conversation that I have had with Giselle this past week, when talking about an email that she sent to the Church, we discussed that understanding has different “levels.” I would like to explore this more deeply in a future study dedicated to that particular topic, but the idea here is that it is not enough to merely “know doctrine.” This is important, of course. This is essential to being able to speak knowledgeably and intelligently with others to convince them of the truth. But what gives power to our words and our work is to make this knowledge a living power within us. This is the power of the Holy Spirit working through us, making the Gospel a force that truly changes both our lives, and those with whom we speak.

We must have an understanding of the situation – in this case, that means both the truth, and the needs of those who have not heard it, and then we must be able to teach that truth effectively to those of “all classes” as the quote mentions.

[quote]

A few faithful workers have been trying to do something in this great, wicked city [New York]. But their work has been difficult, because they have had so few facilities. Elder—and his wife have labored

faithfully. But who has felt the burden of sustaining them in their labors? Who among our leading men have visited them, to learn the needs of the work?—The General Conference Bulletin, April 7, 1903.

[/quote]

Here we see a need that is a present one in our modern CSDA Church, that of communication. Fortunately, we have been blessed with the ability to communicate instantly with those in all parts of the world. Of course, this has its own challenges, such as dealing with different times of the day in different places, but there is still much that can be done to share our burdens one with another, to ask for prayers, and to encourage one another in difficult situations.

We must not feel ashamed or “shy” to express our thoughts to one another, to speak of difficulties. We must not come to believe that these will be seen as weaknesses, or a lack of faith. We are often called to endure trials personally, and of course we would not wish to discourage our brethren with frequent complaints about our current circumstances, or things that cannot be changed; but there is a balance here as well, as in all things. Many things are best discussed between two individuals. Some of my best conversations with Church members have begun with one of us coming to the other and saying something like, “I am having difficulty understanding with, or dealing with, such and such a matter.” An understanding of this is necessary to become “friendly” with one another, as befitting true brethren.

[quote]

Time is rapidly passing into eternity, and these cities have as yet scarcely been touched. There is a power that the Spirit of God can impart to truth. As light is flashed into the mind, a conviction will take hold of hearts that will be too powerful to resist....

My duty is to say that God is earnestly calling for a great work to be done in the cities. New fields are to be opened. Men who know the message and who should feel the responsibilities of the work have manifested so little faith that because of difficulties or fears there has been a long neglect.—Letter 150, 1909.

[/quote]

Some may look at this and say – and I think it is a hidden temptation with some among us – “Well, if God wants His people to work in the cities, waiting with a flash of inspiration and conviction, why doesn’t He impart this light and conviction *first*, and then the work can be done effectively?”

This is very similar to the nominal SDA position, and it is quite deadly, that goes, “When the latter rain falls, then we will be righteous.”

The latter rain is the watering of the true wheat. When rain falls, to extend this into a more complete parable, wheat becomes healthier wheat, and thorns become healthier thorns. Water does not make wheat out of tares. Spiritual water does not convert a sinner into a saint; it merely makes one a stronger version of what one already is. I hope you understand this saying.

If one says, “I am a tare (which is anything less than fully wheat), but when the water comes, I will take nourishment and become a stalk of wheat...” This is foolishness in the physical world, and it is no less foolish in the spiritual one. You must be a stalk of wheat, perhaps weakened by the sun, perhaps alone in

a field with shallow soil, but a stalk of wheat indeed, and then the rain will give you benefit, preparation for the harvest.

So to apply that principle to the quote above, the flash of Yah's glory that Ellen White is talking about there is not intended to *make* anyone into a Gospel worker. We must be Gospel workers, and then the light flashes and shows us the way in which to walk. But it is like many other things in the Scriptures – we must set foot in the Jordan before it parts before us. We must sing songs of victory before Jericho's walls will fall before us. Anything other than this would be Yah using force on us, to make us into things we would not otherwise have truly chosen to be. That is not valid worship, nor freely-given love.

[quote]

Seven men should have been chosen to be united with the president, to set in operation a work in the great cities for those who are perishing without the truth, while no determined efforts are being put forth to save them. These seven men should be men who are wide awake, men that are humble and meek and lowly in heart. Never should the cities have been neglected as they are; for there has come most decidedly message after message calling for earnest labor.

No less than seven men should be chosen to carry the large responsibilities of the work of God in the great cities. And these men should humble themselves daily and seek the Lord most earnestly for sanctified wisdom. They should relate themselves to God as men desirous to be taught. They must be men of prayer, who realize the peril of their own souls. What should be the work of these seven men? They should investigate the needs of the cities and put forth earnest, decided efforts to advance the work.— Letter 58, 1910.

[/quote]

Here is one of those places where “time and place must be considered” indeed. In Ellen White's day, “seven men” was a relatively small thing to ask from among the constituency. Now it is a very large portion of the total number of workers. And the statement here is that “no less” should shoulder the burden of this one aspect of the evangelical work. Truly, only Yah can accomplish His will in these days, and it requires each of us to be “seven times” more awake, and “seven times” more humble, meek and lowly in heart. How can this be possible? It is very much possible, for this is a Bible promise:

“The words of Yahweh are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” (Psalm 12:6) These precious metals, gold, and silver, are used in the Scriptures as symbols of faith, which are made even purer, rather than degraded, by the heat of a furnace. It is because our work is more difficult, and because our way forward is less certain, and because there are fewer sympathetic hearts to receive us, that we – by submitting to the providence of these situations – come to rely most perfectly upon the pure words of Yah. We have needs that the earlier Gospel workers do not have, and we know, for we have spoken of this, that Yah always provides for the needs of His people.

The final quote from the three sections for tonight is as follows:

[quote]

The Lord desires us to proclaim the third angel's message with power in these cities.... As we work with all the strength that God grants us, and in humility of heart, putting our entire trust in Him, our labors will not be without fruit. Our determined efforts to bring souls to a knowledge of the truth for this time will be seconded by holy angels, and many souls will be saved. The Lord never forsakes His faithful messengers. He sends to their aid heavenly agencies and accompanies their labors with the power of His Holy Spirit to convince and to convert. All heaven will endorse your appeals.

O that we might see the needs of these great cities as God sees them! We must plan to place in these cities capable men who can present the third angel's message in a manner so forceful that it will strike home to the heart. Men who can do this, we cannot afford to gather into one place, to do a work that others might do.—Manuscript 53, 1909.

[/quote]

Even if all the specifics here do not apply, this section always has, and always will: “our labors will not be without fruit. Our determined efforts to bring souls to a knowledge of the truth for this time will be seconded by holy angels, and many souls will be saved.”

Whenever anyone is tempted with any thoughts of hesitation, or doubt, in doing the work of Yah, let the ministry of angels not be neglected in our thoughts. Let us not forget that even in addition to Yah's omnipotent power, He has commissioned His swift messengers to attend us as we do the work of the Gospel. We are promised that our work will not be without fruit. We know this to be so. The world will tell us that we are few, and weak, and without power. We will be, and have been, mocked when our members are imprisoned and obstacles appear to be too great to overcome. Yah is with His people, and His glory has arisen upon them. As the Word has foretold, all who are Yahshua's indeed will take advantage of this mighty blessing, and will finish the work. All who desire to be may be Yahshua's indeed, but for this, we must cast aside doubts, and fears, and distractions... and commit ourselves to the message that He has commissioned us to bring to those in need.

This is our work, as set out before us, and there are precious principles and promises to guide our way.

Are there any questions or comments as we close?