

Succession and Inheritance

Happy Sabbath to all.

Earlier this week, I was thinking about the way that we, as Adventists, handle the writings of the Pioneers. As a result, I wrote this relatively simple study that is designed to address a single question:

“What is the difference between an ‘inheritor’ and a ‘successor?’”

During most Bible studies, I prefer to stick with the “scripture only” approach; however, as we are actually talking about SDA writings this time I believe it is appropriate to begin with this well-known, and relevant, passage:

“In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: ‘Found wanting.’ By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged.”
[Last Day Events, page 59]

[Please read the above paragraph before continuing]

Now, what is it that constitutes the “light bestowed, the opportunities given?”

We have often heard the terms “Greater Light” used for the Bible, and “Lesser Light” used for the inspired writings of Mrs. White. We may also include with this lesser light the writings of other SDA founders, particularly those endorsed directly by Ellen White, for in places she has said clearly that the writings of the pioneers need to be set before the people again so that they may benefit from what Heaven has revealed.

In our own movement, we have learned much from the pioneers’ writings, and more than once it has been remarked that the studies we teach today are so similar in tone and spirit to the ones written by White, Jones, Waggoner, etc., that they could be interchanged with no necessary explanation or introduction.

Their teachings regarding righteousness by faith, the nature of the Godhead, and even the principles (if not the actual practices) of the New Moon days and annual feasts are just as relevant today as they were over a century ago...at least, they are to us.

The mainstream, Conference church would find much objectionable about what the original Adventist authors wrote, to the point where they have disputed with us, sometimes quite heatedly on their part, for merely agreeing with something that even they will – on paper – label as being “inspired.”

Who, then, are the true Seventh-day Adventists?

The Scriptures tell us, “For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.” (Luke 6:44)

If a tree is called an “apple tree” we should expect it to produce no fruit but apples, or else it is known not to be an apple tree. Similarly, one would expect Adventist pioneers, penning Adventist writings to produce a people who live according to Adventist principles and teach the Adventist message.

If that seems (extremely) obvious...it should, but what we find in Adventism today is a number of very dramatic changes to the “fruit,” proving that somewhere along the line another branch was grafted into the good roots laid down by Heaven in the 1800s. The fact that this may be the “largest” branch does not in the least lend legitimacy to the grafting, because it is the fruit – the basis of weighing the Church in the Sanctuary’s balances – that reveals the deception.

Now, it should not be said that every generation of “fruit” must be exactly the same. After all, as I mentioned, our forefathers in the faith did not practice the New Moons as we do, nor did they keep the Feast Days as we have come to understand them. They encouraged the use of the symbols, and the terms, but at no point did the SDA Church ever declare and hold a Passover or Feast of Tabernacles.

New Light is indeed given to those who have cherished the Old, which leads me around to my original question...what is the difference between an “inheritor” and a “successor?”

I would say that both the Conference SDA Church as well as this Remnant has “inherited” the light and works given by Yahweh to our pioneers. Both of us have access to them, and claim them as our own.

We have received the blessings of knowing that our Father raised up a movement in the 1800s to prepare the way for the soon return of His Son, and to sanctify a people who would receive Him with peace, in contrast to His appearance among His brethren after the flesh (the Jewish Nation) the first time.

But is that enough? Is it sufficient to merely “inherit” the light we have been shown in the past, or must we do something more? Remember, the quote above says that we will be weighed not only by the “light” we have received but also the “opportunities.”

Light is what is shown to us at a present time... opportunities are possibilities for the future.

What is an inheritance? If one has a family that owns lands, and houses, and worldly goods...upon the passing-away of the older generation, the newer receives ownership of these things. But they receive nothing more than has been obtained through the work and fortunes of those that went before. The property grows no larger with time, and the houses need to be maintained. While some properties do increase in value with age, so may associated costs.

The Conference SDA church has “inherited” the light from its pioneers, and it works (to a degree) to maintain that light...but because it has done nothing beyond receiving this light, seeking (as a collective body) nothing further than maintenance, it has gone cold, and it has gone dark.

Those who have read *The Great Controversy* know well what happens to reformers that cease to reform. This should also bring to mind the parable regarding the Talents, which begins as follows:

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.” (Mat 25:14 – 18)

As we recall, the servants who used what they had received to gain still more were rewarded by the master; he that buried his talent, returning it to his lord unimproved, was punished instead.

The parable and the Spirit of Prophecy quote are both explaining the same principle. If we are content to merely “inherit” old light, we will stagnate. In order to maintain our lord’s gifts, we would develop codes and creeds (as the Pharisees, Roman Catholics, and most Protestants have done even if they call them by another name). If you ask an Adventist about the “28 Fundamentals” they might say, “Oh, that’s not a creed, that’s just a common statement of faith.” But then again, if you ask a Catholic if they are practicing idolatry by praying to statues of saints, they will say, “Oh, that’s not worship, that’s just veneration.”

The point is this: When something is merely “inherited” it is finished. It cannot be improved, expanded, or developed.

Now, this is perfectly fine – IF the thing we are inheriting is already perfectly complete. We inherit the “Faith of Yahshua,” which is perfect beyond all measure. (Rev 14:12) We receive everlasting life and our place within the Heavenly Kingdom, which Peter calls “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” (1 Pet 1:4)

These are divine, perfected, and therefore CANNOT be improved by human effort. In these things, we are blessed indeed to be inheritors.

But when it comes to the light progressively revealed to human beings: doctrines, practices, the work of sanctification, these things were always intended to grow, as it is written,

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.” (Heb 6:1-3)

Obviously, the writer is not saying that we “leave” these things behind, only that we recognize them as merely foundations for what Yahweh truly wishes to do in our lives, for what He truly wishes to teach us of Himself, as when the Son declared, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” (John 16:12)

As Ellen White wrote, we have had many things to learn, and also many things to “unlearn.”* There is growth to be seen, progress to be experienced, but we can never experience these things if we see ourselves merely as what other churches would call the “laity,” as the receivers and inheritors of the pioneers’ light and the teachings of other men. We are each and every one called to be a priest and child of the King. *RH July 26, 1892

Inheritance is static. Succession is progressive.

Succession goes beyond merely receiving what has been given to us, and for us to be righteous before our Father, we must “succeed” rather than “inherit” everything that comes to us from a limited, human source.

The essential nature of what we learn will be the same; an apple will always be an apple...but it will be transformed into a more and more glorious fruit by the progressive leading of the Holy Spirit.

While the pioneers received their wisdom from On High, the General Conference SDA have become content to receive this light second-hand, through the works of human beings. And not to go on about this particular point too long...I bring it up because it is recently relevant.

We have seen that today they go so far as to ridicule any notion that our Father still has a people alive with the Spirit of Prophecy, who are teaching those who would be perfect the things that they need both to learn and to unlearn.

Our members may recall that I recently wrote a response to an SDA blog essentially mocking Pastor “Chick” and the CSDA Church merely for claiming to have the gift of prophecy. The article did not examine the claim. It did not attempt to demonstrate that the claim was false. No, it was sufficient for that author merely to reveal that we “claim” this gift (as I mentioned in my reply, it is the most coveted gift [1Cor 14:39] to request in the New Testament!) to label us a delusional, perhaps dangerous (he hinted) “offshoot.”

This is the spirit of the inheritor, which will always be opposed to the spirit of the successor. The inheritor will look backward. We will use what has come before to reach new light, new heights of sanctification, because we are not content to bury our talent in anticipation of the Master’s return.

We are, of course, cautious when someone comes and says, “Here is a new teaching, here is a new doctrine,” but we examine it according to the Law and the Testimony with open minds and hearts; we never dismiss such claims out-of-hand. We will not become like the world and its churches, so afraid of being deceived, with so little trust in the Father’s own guidance, that they must rely on isolation, on suppression, even – in some cases – on the arm of the human law, in

order to keep their image of the Bride “pure.”

Ultimately, the message here is simple. While we are content to be inheritors of whatsoever the Father and Son give us directly, it would be a grave mistake to apply that same mindset to old light.

Let us not see ourselves as inheritors of the writings of Ellen White and the pioneers. Let us not be locked into their interpretations and conclusions even of inspired visions and revelations (as useful as those are) leaving no room for direct guidance and growth. Our Father did not cease to speak to us in 1888.

Let us be successors indeed: reading for principle, applying divine concepts wherever we can, and seeking after new wisdom even in familiar passages.

In this way, we will – as we were always intended –go beyond our respected pioneers in wisdom and stature, succeeding even where they fell short, covering the world with the Three Angels’ message in the power of the Fourth, enduring even the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, to be alive (and alive forevermore!) at the soon return of our Lord Yahshua the Messiah.

For all that they accomplished, our pioneers never did these things. This is the blessing reserved for us, that “all these things happened unto them [and were written by them, and recorded by them] for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (1Cor 10:11)

Creation 7th day Adventism
flyingcreature@hotmail.com