

8. Ladders Are For Climbing

Peter's second letter is addressed to a group of people who, like himself, had obtained " . . . like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:1.

It would be difficult to express in more beautiful language the fact that these people were like Peter, justified—freed from their old sins—and were walking in newness of life. Then Peter, under inspiration, clearly sets before these born-again Christians God's plan for His righteousness to be imparted to them and to us.

Peter talks plainly and authoritatively on the subject of sanctification. He makes the sweeping claim that " . . . all things that pertain unto life and godliness. . . " are given unto us. He even states fully the process by which these gifts come to the believer—by believing the great and precious promises that point us to the fact that the born-again believer can be a partaker of the divine nature.

Further, he states that he escapes the corruption of the world through this same process. 2 Peter 1:3,4. The corruption of lust spoken of here is selfishness, which is initially destroyed in the death of the old nature, by faith. This results in Jesus being able to justify the believer as he reckons himself to be dead indeed unto sin. Romans 6:12.

The believer then, according to Paul, is not only justified by the blood of Christ (His death), but he is saved by the life of Jesus. Romans 5:10. What life is that? Praise His holy name! It is His perfect life (character) that He worked out on earth for thirty-three and one-half years.

It is Jesus' character that is first credited to the believer in justification, resulting in a life record of the past that reads, "just as if I'd never sinned." This character is then made real in the believer's life as he learns to walk in this newness of life, trusting his Lord to supply the "all things" that pertain to this new life.

Of course, the goal in learning to walk in this new life is to completely rely upon the divine nature to crush out the habits of the old nature that are a carry-over from the old, but recently crucified, nature.

“As God works in the heart, and man surrenders his will to God, and cooperates with God, he works out in the life what God works in by the Holy Spirit, and there is harmony between the purpose of the heart and the practice of the life. Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained.”¹

It is quite natural, at this point, to focus upon the thought of having to be obedient. This is where the Christian often fails. Our focus should be on surrender. If we are consistent in our surrender, then God will work in us “ . . . to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13

Character is what we are. Reputation is what people think we are. The first is revealed by our habit patterns, the second by thoughtful control. “The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.”²

Habitual living is that which we do before we consciously think about what to do. Much of our living day by day is motivated by the subconscious mind. Our surrender to Christ’s leading in our lives must become habitual. That is, it must become the natural thing to do.

“We may keep so near to God that in every unexpected trial our thoughts will turn to Him as naturally as the flower turns to the sun.”³

Paul urges us by saying, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5. Then follows a surrender so complete that it was ". . . unto death, even the death of the cross." Verse 8.

By the word "let," we understand that the controlling power is in our hands. "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."⁴

This goal can only be reached through the new birth experience in the context of righteousness by faith. The credited righteousness of justification and the given righteousness of sanctification are the ". . . all things that pertain unto life and godliness . . ." 2 Peter 1:3. These marvelous gifts of God become ours as we let Him do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves.

Daniel's prayer should be ours: "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces. . ." Daniel 9:7. It is hard for man to face the fact that in him dwells nothing good. It is "When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ."⁵ When the term "two-faced" is used, we know what the speaker means. I believe that Daniel was simply saying, "Lord, no matter which face I try to wear, it all ends in confusion for it is not real."

Oh, that God would be allowed to make Himself real in us so that we could say with Paul, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the *face of Jesus Christ*. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Corinthians 4:6,7. (Italics supplied.)

Peter's ladder of sanctification is given to us in 2 Peter 1:5-7. "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to

brotherly kindness charity (love).” Here Peter sets before us the steps by which Bible sanctification can be attained.

“Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity are the rounds of the ladder. We are saved by climbing round after round, mounting step after step, to the height of Christ’s ideal for us. Thus He is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”⁶

Before we start ascending this ladder we must learn more of the characteristics that comprise its unique structure. Each round in this ladder is a step in character development. However, we do not perfect each stage before we move up the ladder.

We might say that this ladder is like a rope ladder hung from above. This is what makes it a ladder of faith, its support is from above. The climber beginning on the bottom rung picks up the steps one at a time as he goes, adding to his character and “. . . as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication.”⁷

Each step must be taken in *order* for they are tied together and are interdependent. The second depends upon the first for its foundation upon which to build. Each character step continues to be multiplied by the Lord as long as we continue to grow spiritually.

There is one thing further we need to know about this ladder:

“Before the believer is held out the wonderful possibility of being like Christ, obedient to all the principles of the law. But of himself man is utterly unable to reach this condition. The holiness that God’s word declares he must have before he can be saved, is the result of the working of divine grace, as he bows in submission to the discipline and restraining influences of the Spirit of truth

The part of the Christian is to persevere in overcoming every fault. Constantly he is to pray to the Saviour to heal the disorders of his sin-sick soul. *He has not the wisdom or the strength to overcome; these belong to the Lord, and He bestows them on those who in humiliation and contrition seek Him for help.*"⁸

Did you notice that our work is to submit to life's experiences, without complaint, accepting everything as coming from Christ even though it may have originated with Satan? Because Christ's robe of righteousness surrounds us, we must recognize that nothing can touch us except by His permission. Romans 8:28.

Christ permits to touch us only that which will help our character to become like His. (See Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing p. 71) By accepting this truth we learn to trust Him in every experience of life. Thus, we live by faith and not by sight. It was thus that Jesus lived here as our example.

Here is another picture: "This work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to cooperate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits."⁹ Once again God's work and man's work are defined. God's work is the daily work of sanctification. Our work is to cooperate by "cultivating right habits."

If we are to cultivate right habits, the natural question is, how? We might try by exercising the will, by determined effort, by repetition of the desired habit, or we might try prayer.

May I suggest that the word cultivate was, no doubt, chosen because of its depth of meaning. If we would change the wording from habits to carrots we would have less trouble understanding the how. Now if we are cultivating carrots we all know how to do that. We simply remove weeds and break up the hard soil so the carrots can grow. But what do we do with the carrots? We leave them in the Lord's care. Only He can cause them to grow. We can only remove hindrances to that growth.

“He longs to reveal His grace. If His people will remove the obstructions, He will pour forth the waters of salvation in abundant streams through the human channels.”¹⁰

“There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation.”¹¹

We already have learned that we can't change ourselves. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Jeremiah 13:23. Our work in removing hindrances and obstacles in our character formation is to recognize them when we see them. Then we are to be persevering in our prayers to God to heal our sin-sick souls. He will remove these hindrances when we are ready to stop protecting these hindering factors. We need to recognize a weed from the true plant.

The fruits of the Spirit are tender plants that need careful cultivation until they are well rooted. Then they become dominant to the point where we can say with Paul, “. . . none of these things move me . . .” Acts 20:24.

All this preparatory work, as well as the climbing of Peter's ladder, is a work of faith. “There are those who attempt to ascend the ladder of Christian progress; but as they advance, they begin to put their trust in the power of man, and soon lose sight of Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith. The result is failure.” (See The Acts of the Apostles, p. 532.)

Let us clearly understand that sanctification, like justification, is a work of faith at every step.

“The followers of Christ are to become like him – by the grace of God to form characters in harmony with the principles of His holy law. This is Bible sanctification. This work can be accomplished only through faith in Christ, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.”¹²

“In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul. It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness.”¹³

“None but Christ can fashion anew the character that has been ruined by sin. He came to expel the demons that had controlled the will.”¹⁴

“It is through the impartation of the grace of Christ that sin is discerned in its hateful nature, and finally driven from the soul temple.”¹⁵

These statements make it very clear that only as Christ’s character is imparted to us in sanctification are we able to see sin for what it really is—a malignant disease. Only then can we learn to hate it. This fact will become clear as we begin to ascend the ladder.

You will notice sin is in the singular, which points to the disease and not sins, which are the symptoms of the disease. We can very easily work up quite a strong feeling of hatred for the sins that reveal that there is a sinful nature from which they spring. Yet our efforts are most often directed toward the symptoms and not the disease. And this is what Satan would have us do. For until the disease is taken care of, he knows that the symptoms will be there to keep us battling and defeated.

It is a fact that we overlook the reality that every human being in his human (fleshly) nature is infected with the same deadly disease of sin. From God’s viewpoint the disease in any stage is still deadly. Some symptoms, however, are quite acceptable in the best of society, while others would be rejected as making one incorrigible.

God must be allowed to reveal to us this deadly nature and bring us to the point where we look at sin as He does. Then we will long to be free from its vicious tentacles. Why is this so hard for human beings to see? Because we are sin-hardened, callused to the point where we hardly recognize sin when we come in contact with it. The tragedy of this is the fact that as we live in this condition we forget that "He (Christ) was free from the taint of sin, the refined sensibilities of His holy nature rendered contact with evil unspeakably painful to Him."¹⁶ What a work must be accomplished in us that we might reflect His image perfectly.

Before we begin climbing this ladder of sanctification, let us take an overview of the chart (found on page 65a). Here we attempt to show how Satan has a counterfeit plan for sanctification as he does for every Bible truth. God's plan begins with faith and ends with love (divine love). Satan's plan begins with self, very much alive, and ends with emotionalism.

Satan's plan develops hindrances, obstacles, that prevent the Christian from developing the character of Christ. These characteristics become stronger and stronger, thus preventing the end result of divine love from being attained. In its place is a very entrancing, bewitching, and deceptive substitute which we call emotionalism. It is in this area of emotional living where Satan holds spellbound millions of deceived Christian people.

I do not mean to convey the thought that there is no emotion in the way of the Lord. There truly is. But it is the love of Christ that constraineth us. 2 Corinthians 5:14. That is, the love of Christ holds us together. This is the effect of divine love.

Emotionalism tends toward strong feelings, especially toward those who understand each other. The love of Christ, on the other hand, reaches out and engulfs even those who oppose and even fight against us. It accepts any kind of treatment and still reacts only with love. Obviously, this is not natural to the human being. It must be a gift from God. That is what sanctification accomplishes.

We must remember also that the Christian, while allowing God to develop His character in man, grows in grace (God's character), not into grace (God's character)¹⁷. The growth process is hard to recognize as it operates, but the result is evident both to the believer and to those with whom he comes in contact.

Keep in mind as we ascend the ladder that each step is one of faith as is shown in the statements between the two ladders on our chart.

Yes, ladders are for climbing, and we are about ready to begin. So let us pray that God will reveal any hindrances or obstacles that would prevent His working in us to produce the fruit of righteousness. It might be a good idea to take a quick look at the character fruit we can expect to be revealed as He does this marvelous work in us. “. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance“ Galatians 5:22,23.

10/17/03

Notes

- 1 Selected Messages, book 1, p.397.
- 2 Steps to Christ, pp. 57, 58.
- 3 Steps to Christ, pp. 99, 100. (Italics supplied.)
- 4 Christ's Object Lessons, p. 69.
- 5 Christ Our Righteousness, p. 104, The Review and Herald, September 16, 1902
- 6 The Acts of the Apostles, p. 530.
- 7 The Acts of the Apostles, p. 532.
- 8 The Acts of the Apostles, p. 532.
- 9 The Acts of the Apostles, p. 532.
- 10 The Desire of Ages, p. 251.
- 11 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 124.
- 12 The Great Controversy, p. 469.
- 13 The Desire of Ages, p. 98.
- 14 The Desire of Ages, p. 38.
- 15 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 366.
- 16 The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7A, p. 451, The Review and Herald, Nov. 8, 1887.
- 17 Christ's Object Lessons, p. 271.