

The Refiner's Fire

Seeing the Goldsmith's Face

Lesson #4 for October 27, 2007

Scriptures: Job 23:1-10; Daniel 12:1-10; Matthew 5:16; 25:1-12; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; 4:11-16.

1. This lesson is about the relationship between Christian growth, the perfection of character, and persecution. If it is by beholding that we become changed, (GC 555) what does that have to do with persecution? How does God purify us? Are we being purified today? Can persecution make us more like God?
2. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we were made originally in the image of God. Romans 8:29 suggests that God's ultimate goal is to return us to that image. Can we—as sinful human beings—even understand what the image of God is? What does sin do to us?
3. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.” Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 671. Do you know anyone who has fully developed into the image of God?
4. Our memory text for this lesson, 2 Corinthians 3:18, suggests that if we can clearly see God's character and desire to be like Him, we can be transformed into that image. Is this possible? Ellen White, of course, repeats that thought many times. (*Great Controversy*, p. 555)
5. So what is the relationship between beholding God, persecution, and ultimate perfection? If we are not being persecuted, is it because we are not beholding and being perfected? If we are serious about beholding Christ, will the devil always bring persecution on us? What does it take to get the devil excited enough to bring on persecution? In the midst of that persecution, what can we do to glorify the name of God? (Matthew 5:16)
6. Read Hebrews 12:1-11. This passage suggests that God will discipline those He really loves. Does that ever include what we might call persecution? If so, why aren't we being persecuted today? Is it possible that God recognizes that we are not worth the effort? Or that He knows that we are not willing to change and grow? Or possibly, that if persecution came, we would fall apart?
7. Do we agree that trials are intended to help us develop Christlike character?
8. How do we develop character? Is it possible that we were born with it? We noted in lesson number two that “sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime.”—Ellen G. White, “Transformed by Grace,” *Acts of the Apostles* 560. Have we been continually growing in grace throughout our lifetimes? Are some of us too old to grow anymore? If the final times of trouble were to begin tomorrow, how would we survive?
9. Does living in a Christian community and among members of your own church help you to develop character?
10. As we seek to grow as Christians, does it help to have healthy habits, good devotional habits, regular church attendance, regular Bible study, and a prayer life?
11. Read Job 23:1-10. Clearly, Job had an incredible relationship with God! How did he develop that relationship? Did someone in his family teach him when he was younger? Without a Bible, without a church, without a pastor, without a local

community of believers, how did he maintain that relationship? Did his wife help?

12. Would the story of Job have turned out differently if Job knew in advance the information in Job 1 & 2? Would it have been easier for Job? Will it be easier for us?
13. What is it about persecution that scares you? Are you worried about losing a relationship? About being physically tormented? What do trials do to us? What did Job's experience do to/for him? We talk about gold being purified in the fire. How does that apply to human beings? Do you have to have "gold" in your character before it can be purified?
14. Read the following statements from Ellen White.
 - 1) "God gives the talents, the powers of the mind; we form the character."—Ellen G. White, "Talents," *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 331.
 - 2) "The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle. They used the means which God had placed within their reach; and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results."—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 97
 - 3) Happiness is the result of holiness, and conformity to the will of God. **Those who would be saints in heaven, must first be saints upon the earth; for when we leave this earth, we shall take our character with us, and this will be simply taking with us some of the elements of heaven imparted to us through the righteousness of Christ. . . .** {*Review and Herald*, Aug. 19, 1890; *RC* 303.6; *3SM* 191.1; compare *Letter 18b*, 1891; *Adventist Home*, p. 16.2; *2MCP* 620.2; *SD* 112.7; *LDE* 295; *Heaven* 90.1.
 - 4) Every provision has been made that we may be so conformed to the divine character that Christ can take us to live with Him in heaven. Exceeding great and precious promises have been made to us, but they are fulfilled to us only as we gain a knowledge of God. This knowledge is given to those who become partakers of the divine nature. **Those who are saved must in this life gain a fitness to dwell with the royal family in the courts of heaven.** {*ST*, November 30, 1904 par. 7}

How many saints do you know? How many saints do you think Ellen White knew? Was it easier to be a saint in her day?

15. Notice the following: "A noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ." But, there will be "...hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 331. How many of us are waging hard, stern battles with self? How many of our battles are not against hereditary tendencies but against acquired tendencies or habits of sin? (James 1:13-15)
16. In one of the last parables which Jesus spoke to His disciples in Matthew 25:1-12, we learn about the 10 young women. Five of them had extra oil and five did not. What is the "oil"? It has often been suggested that the oil represents the Holy Spirit.

In the parable, the foolish virgins are represented as begging for oil, and failing to receive it at their request. This is symbolic of those who have not prepared themselves by developing a character to stand in a time of crisis.—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, Jan. 16, 1896.

So which is it? How can we have more character and more of the Holy Spirit? Does

the Holy Spirit help us to develop characters which will stand firm in times of crisis? Is our character ultimately represented by our behavior? Our good works? Our relationship with God?

17. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus talked about judging sheep and goats. Sheep and goats are easy to tell apart. Even a small child with a little practice can do it. Will the judgment of God be that easy? Can you look around you in your community—or even in your church—and distinguishes the “sheep” from the “goats”? Jesus seemed to suggest that the ones who are His faithful children will be taking care of those who are the most needy. What does that have to do with character, growth, persecution, and perfection?
18. It has been suggested that “character is what a person is in the dark.” Or possibly “what a person is when no one else is looking”!
19. Ellen White suggests that character is the only thing we can take with us to heaven. (See #14-3 above) What exactly is it that we can take with us? Do we take our personality also? Which is more important? (Revelation 22:11)
20. Scripture seems to suggest that good character is equal to “godlikeness.” How do we become more like Christ? “Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do.” *Education* p. 17
21. Based on their understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, some have suggested that character is not an accomplishment, but a gift. Do you agree with that? In what sense is character a gift? How does that relate to persecution?
22. Who are the 144,000? If God were doing “tryouts” for the 144,000 right now, would you qualify? What does it take to qualify?
23. In our very relaxed, easy lives, how are we preparing ourselves for “a time of distress unequalled at any other time in history”? (Daniel 12:1) Are we preparing ourselves for a time of real stress? Are we trying to pretend that it will not happen?
24. Read Job 23:1-10 again. Could you make the statements that Job made if you were in his circumstances?
25. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. And Hebrews 5:14-6:2. Does the church help us to grow up? Does the church need us to grow up? Can we help each other to grow?
26. What do you think the devil will do to the 144,000? What would he like to do? What does God allow him to do? It is relatively easy to be nice when other people are being nice to you? How do you respond when people treat you unfairly, or roughly, or even persecute you?
27. Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today. {Ed 225.3}

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