

Atonement and the Cross of Christ ***United to Christ***

Lesson #12 for December 20, 2008

Scriptures: Romans 5:19; 6:3-6; 8:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 4:5-7; 6:15; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.

1. This lesson is about what happens when a person chooses to become a member of God's family, the church, as opposed to following his own ways or the ways of Satan. Sometimes that is referred to as "conversion," even becoming members of the "new humanity."
2. What change takes place when a person chooses to become a member of God's family and is baptized into the church of God? What are the most important differences between the way a Christian lives his day by day life and the way a "person of the world" lives it?
3. We have spoken often of the conflict referred to as the "great controversy" which takes place in human minds. We have recognized that it is a "war" between the forces of Satan and his angels and the forces of God and His angels. But what difference does this conflict make in the way we live our lives day by day?
4. The Bible describes Christians as "new creatures." What does that imply? (2 Corinthians 5:17) New Christians often get the impression that they must choose to be on God's side or to be on Satan's side. But in a larger sense, the only choice we really have is about who is going to be "lord" of our lives.
5. If we live our lives day by day choosing to do what we think is important or even choosing to do what we think is right, we are only following the path of Satan. Remember that Lucifer thought he was doing what was right when he "fought" for the "rights" of angels. In order to be true children of God and Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we must make Christ the most important Person in our lives. We do that by studying and thinking about what Christ has done—beginning in Genesis and going all the way through Revelation. At each step of our lives, we must allow Christ and the Holy Spirit to suggest what we should do.
6. If we allow our minds to be engaged with thinking about things of this world—even things that might be fully legitimate and worthwhile—and if our lives are oriented to events and ideas that mold our environment, then, sooner or later, Satan will find a way to manipulate circumstances around us to control our lives. Our only safety is to establish a "safe fortress" in our minds where God and His Word reign.

Our world is focused on feeling good. People do not want to be good, they just want to feel good! Our whole "television environment," our musical world, our drug world, our psychological world are oriented to making people feel good.

7. By contrast, if we look to Jesus and spend sufficient time thinking about what He has done, about the stories of the Bible, about the events of His life and death, then as we do so, the Holy Spirit enters into our minds and actually molds us bit by bit to become the kind of children God is looking for. This process is sometimes called "sanctification." A better description would be "by beholding we become changed." Our characters and our minds are filled up with what we see and hear and think every day. The more time we spend with God, the more we will enjoy it. (Matthew 5:16)
8. It has been demonstrated that almost everything that happens to us is permanently recorded in our brains. It is not just those things which happen outside of us that are permanently recorded in our brains but also our motives, our choices, and our thoughts. If those motives, choices, and thoughts are guided by the Holy Spirit because day by day we are giving the Holy Spirit opportunity

to work in our minds and we are consciously choosing to allow Him to work there—as opposed to allowing the influences of this world which are satanic to work there—then, bit by bit we are being changed into “children of God.” When that happens we will find that it is more comfortable for us to be around others who think like we do. The more time we spend with Christ and the Holy Spirit, the more we will enjoy our fellowship with Them. Instead of choosing to do things our way as did our first parents, we will choose to do things God’s way because we recognize the superiority of that way. In time, as our lives are changed, people will begin to look at us and praise God because of our behavior. (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12)

9. But Satan does not give up easily. He will do everything possible to get our attention and lure us back into the “way of sin.” But as we give the Holy Spirit opportunity to work in our lives, we will slowly recognize that living lives oriented to this earth versus living lives oriented to Christ and the Holy Spirit are as different from each other as night and day. The two lifestyles are totally incompatible. Jesus referred to that change as “being born again.” (John 13:35) Jesus suggested that if Christians were living the lives that they should be living, people would immediately recognize that they are completely different because of the “love” they have for each other. Sometimes, Christians can be so snobbish that they are acting more like Satan than like Jesus. What would happen in our churches if people really could “see” God in us? If our children saw Jesus in us, they would not be leaving the church so fast through the “back door.”
10. Ideally, the change that needs to take place in Christians begins to take place when—or even before—he or she is baptized. Unfortunately, few Christians fully recognize the significance of their choice at that time. (John 3:3-8) When God becomes most important in our lives, we are “adopted” into His family. (Galatians 4:5-7) And the changes which can begin now will continue throughout eternity. Gradually, we will be transformed to be more like Christ because we shall see Him as He is. (1John 3:2) “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ.” {DA 83.4} The atmosphere around us is a reflection of the kind of God we worship.

There is a process that takes place in our minds that we need to understand better. Our minds are filled with—and our characters and personalities reflect to a certain extent—the things that we put into them each day. So what do SDAs in our communities fill their minds with? Clothing, food, the economy, our bank accounts, our professions, television, etc. What chance does God have to influence our lives?

This is not some kind of “mystical” union whereby we literally live and die with Christ, but rather, it is a level of communication and fellowship that will transform us as we have suggested.

11. How would you describe the differences between a life oriented to this world and a Christian life? If Jesus were alive in our world today as a human being, what kind of life would He live? Compare and contrast that with the lives of typical humans living today. As you look at the lives of people around you, how many of their actions day by day and hour by hour are motivated by selfishness? Do you know people who because of their relationship with Jesus Christ actually manifest love on a regular basis? Is it easy to differentiate between those who are motivated by selfishness and those who are motivated by love? If our choices on a day by day basis are primarily selfish, then we are “following the footsteps” of Satan. What changes need to take place for a person born into sin in our world to become a true child of God—born of the Spirit? How do we initiate those changes?
12. Read Romans 6:3-6 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. From ancient times there have been those who have described the plan of salvation as a “mystical union” with Jesus Christ. When we have faith in Him and choose to be a Christian, then a “mysterious change” takes place in us through which we “share” in the life of Christ and in His death. By baptism we symbolically “die” with Jesus to our old sinful ways and become new creatures, living lives as far as possible like the life which

Jesus lived.

13. In actual fact, the change is not so “mysterious” or “mystical.” If we truly take time to look at and study the life of Christ and understand His character through His relationship to human beings as recorded throughout the Bible, then, in the same way that a child becomes like its parents—by watching them, by listening to them, and by copying as far as possible their behaviors—we become changed into the likeness of Christ. Slowly, step by step, the Holy Spirit working in our “hearts” and minds reveals to us how to live a completely changed life. The change in our lives will be so evident that Jesus was able to say, “If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (John 13:35, *Good News Bible*) Jesus was suggesting that the only way to live that kind of life is in “union with” Him and by the outworking of the Holy Spirit.
14. This change is so remarkable that Ellen White said:

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God’s thought made audible. In His prayer for His disciples He says, “I have declared unto them Thy name,”—“merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,”—“that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” **But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. [What are they learning from us?] God’s wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which “angels desire to look,” and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed [20] and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love.** In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which “seeketh not her own” has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.— Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 19,20.

It is wonderful to hear a two-year-old sing, “Jesus loves the little ones like me, me, me!” But is that supposed to be our theme throughout eternity?

Over time, our lives will be changed from manifesting “rebellion, disobedience, and alienation” into lives that demonstrate “restoration, reunion, and reconciliation.” So, how can we live lives that show the love of God? There is only one way to become like Jesus, and that is to take the time to contemplate Him and seek to become like Him.

15. If we stop and think carefully about the motivations and actions that guide the behavior of the typical person of the world and compare those with the actions and behaviors that we see in the life of Jesus, it will be obvious that if we become like Him, there will be a radical change in our lives. There are many benefits to living a Christlike life:

These include grace (*Eph. 1:2*), the gift of eternal life (*Rom. 6:23*), God’s call to a holy life (*Phil. 3:14*), election (*Eph. 1:4*), redemption (*Col. 1:14*), justification (*Gal. 2:17*), forgiveness (*Eph. 4:32*), and sanctification (*1 Cor. 1:2*). In Him we were created for good works (*Eph. 2:10*), we have access to God (*Eph. 3:12*), we are now seated in heavenly places (*Eph. 2:6*), we have an inheritance (*Eph. 1:10,11*), we are triumphant (*2 Cor. 2:14*), we can do all things (*Phil. 4:13*), we are rooted and built up (*Col. 2:7*). All of these and much more are ours only in union with Christ.

The phrase is also used to indicate that everything the Christian does is done in
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union with Him: We rejoice in Him (*Phil. 3:1*), boast and glory in Him (*Rom. 15:17*), stand firm in Him (*Phil. 4:1*), are strong in Him (*Eph. 6:10*), and do works of faith in Him (*Gal. 5:6*). *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (Wednesday, December 17)

By beholding we become changed until Christ actually “reigns” in our lives.

16. So, will we live new lives in Christ? Or will we continue to step back and live lives motivated by selfishness—following Satan’s example? So often, we have the idea that our job is to make the right choices and to do what is good every day. But as we suggested earlier, the only choice that we really have is who is going to be “Lord” of our lives.

Suppose that we could have an angel come and tell us what to do each day, or even each week. Wouldn’t we be excited to follow his instructions? But if God or one of His angels made a miraculous appearance to us each week, guess who would demand equal time! And pretty soon we would have a really hard time even knowing which angel was speaking to us!

So, the major avenue that God uses to communicate with us is through the Holy Spirit and the Book which He inspired. That is why we must give attention to it each day.

Are we attracted by what we see “in Christ,” or is selfishness the subtle motivator for virtually everything we do? Do we perform even “loving” acts so that people will think better of us? Is it more important to us to have a good standing in the eyes of those we work with and those who live with us here on this earth or to cause rejoicing in heaven by becoming “new creatures” in Christ? (Luke 15:7) The world will literally be able to “see Jesus in us”! (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12)

17. Christ took human nature that men might be one with Him as He is one with the Father, that God may love man as He loves His only-begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete in Him.—Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 251.

Can we even imagine such a relationship? What would be seen in the life of one such person? The world would be amazed by the life of such a person. The most important thing in my life is to focus on Jesus.

18. The problem that Paul was trying to deal with in Romans 14 was, “How are we to get along with other church members?” Romans 14:23 tells us that faith is a process whereby we become more and more like God. By contrast, sin is a process whereby we become more and more like Satan. Through Adam’s fall we were all born as “sinners.” But each one of us has the opportunity to be “born” again “into Christ”—to be transformed into His likeness and to live forever in harmony with Him.
19. From a human perspective, the great controversy is won not by violent “battles” which take place between great armies but by the daily, step by step transformation that takes place in the lives of Christians. The battlefield of the great controversy takes place “between our ears.” If our lives are filled with dealing with and responding to what is taking place in the world around us, then we will be controlled by Satan. He will find a way to manipulate our environment to keep us so busy that we have no time for Christ or in some other way to keep us from becoming more like Him. Whose side are you going to be on?

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