

## **Revival and Reformation**

### **Witness and Service: The Fruit of Revival**

Lesson #4 for July 27, 2013

Scriptures: Matthew 28:19,20; John 6:1-11; 20:21; Acts 2; 8:26-38; 22:1-14.

1. What is the role of witnessing in revival? If we have a deep spiritual experience with Jesus Christ through Bible study and prayer, shouldn't that be enough? When one begins to share his faith, he discovers that it is often the case that the truth is not as well cemented in his mind as he once thought. In order to share your faith, you must have it clearly in mind. Often, those who focus on Bible study and prayer end up with a lonely spiritual experience. Sometimes, they become critical of others who do not have an experience just like theirs. Of course, such an attitude is anything but Christian. The goal is not to just change external behavior; the goal is to change hearts.
2. Changed Christian hearts lead us to be more and more like Jesus whose constant focus in His communion with His Father and in His prayers and in His actions was what He could do for others. Is that our focus? Are we really motivated by Christian love? Or, by something else?
3. Since the days of Abraham, it has been God's intention that His true people would witness for Him to all around them. (Genesis 12:1-3) Unfortunately, the experience described in the Old Testament was that the children of Israel were converted to the fertility cult religions instead of the other way around! Then, in the Gospels, Jesus repeated His call to action. Read Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45-49; and John 20:21. Each of the Gospels says that God's goal for the Christian church is to go forth, preach, make disciples, witness, baptize, and teach people to obey. If we do that, God will send the power of His Holy Spirit to aid in that work.
4. Notice these very significant words from Ellen White:

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9. See also *FLB* 150.2.
5. Paul had this same idea clearly in mind. Read Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10 and Colossians 1:19,20. These verses are especially good in the *Good News Bible*.
6. Hopefully, no one doubts the fact that God wishes that every one of His children could be saved. (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) So, if God wishes that all His children might be saved, why doesn't He send the angels who would be excellent witnesses to each one of us instead of asking human beings to witness? So often, the goal seems impossible from a human standpoint. Consider the disciples just before the day of Pentecost. There were about 120 of them gathered in the upper room. The best estimates are that in the Roman Empire alone in those days, there were about 60-70 million people. That would suggest that there was a ratio of one Christian to every 500,000 people in just the Roman Empire. It seemed like an impossible task considering there was no means of rapid communication.
7. What special things did God do for His followers that made the task at least a little easier?

Under the influence of this heavenly illumination the scriptures that Christ had explained to the disciples stood out before them with the luster of perfect truth. [cf. Luke 18:31-34] The veil that had prevented them from seeing to the end of that which had been abolished, was now removed, and they comprehended with perfect clearness the object of Christ's mission and the nature of His kingdom. They could speak with power of the Saviour; and as they unfolded to their hearers the plan of salvation, many were convicted and

convinced. The traditions and superstitions inculcated by the priests were swept away from their minds, and the teachings of the Saviour were accepted.—*Acts of the Apostles* 44.1

“There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which [40] they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.—*Acts of the Apostles* 39.2. [Content in brackets supplied]

Was that the tower of Babel reversed?

8. And how successful were the Christians at spreading the good news around the Roman Empire of those days?

Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the northern coast of modern Turkey, wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 110. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. “Many of every age, of every social class, even of both sexes, are being called to trial and will be called. Not cities alone but villages in even rural areas have been invaded by the infection of this superstition” (Christianity).

. . . Ninety years later, around A.D. 200, Tertullian, a Roman lawyer turned Christian, wrote a defiant letter to the Roman magistrates defending Christianity. He boasted that “nearly all the citizens of all the cities are Christians.” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, July 22)

9. Remember that that happened in the days when there was no official postal service, no inexpensive writing materials, no telephones, no radios, no televisions, no Internet, and no easy transportation. One walked or at best rode horseback. How did they do it?
10. The real power in New Testament witnessing came from the fact that the disciples and their followers were witnesses to a genuine transformation in their own lives. This was not play-acting; they were not just going through the motions. The truth of the gospel burned in their hearts so brightly that they could not keep quiet about it. Paul called himself a slave. (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 3:5; Ephesians 3:7; Philippians 1:1; etc.) After rethinking his theology following the “Damascus road experience,” Paul felt like he had to tell anyone who would listen. (Acts 22:1-14; Philippians 3:1-7)
11. So, what changed at Pentecost? The disciples were beginning to understand the truth of their mission. Their best Friend had died; and instead of that being the end of all their hopes, He rose to life and went back to heaven. And they knew that if they followed in His footsteps, the same thing could happen to them. What was there to be afraid of? As far as we know, all but one of them died martyrs’ deaths. But, they did so after living dynamic, life-transforming, faith-filled lives.

12. So, what was it that made their witness so effective?

Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but **that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience.** We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347; 3SM 186.3.

13. So, what is the most powerful witness? If we are truly the friends of Jesus and can speak faithfully and truly about Him, His character, and His government, it becomes a witness that even the Devil cannot effectively deny.

Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling. Not all the books written can serve the purpose of a holy life. **Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives.** Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth. (9T 21.1)

**The most powerful evidence a man can give that he has been born again and is a new man in Christ Jesus, is the manifestation of love for his brethren, the doing of Christlike deeds. This is the most wonderful witness that can be borne in favor of Christianity, and will win souls to the truth.** (*General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1900 par. 13)

14. So, what kind of testimony can you give? What kind of testimony are you sharing? (Matthew 5:16)

15. Activity is a law of life. Every organ, every muscle, every tissue needs activity to remain healthy. If one takes a completely healthy person and puts him at bedrest for a significant period of time, he will become weak and hardly able to do anything! The same thing happens to people who do not exercise their spiritual muscles. Why do you suppose Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"? (Acts 20:35) What happens if we share our faith?

16. Read John 6:1-13. Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to be there on that day and to share in the meal miraculously prepared by Jesus? Apparently, both the loaves and fishes multiplied in His hands and in the hands of the disciples. And starting with five loaves and two fishes, they collected 12 basketfuls after He had fed 5000 men plus the women and children.

17. The same thing will happen to those who share their faith.

Witnessing is the gentle breeze that fans the sparks of revival into Pentecostal flames. When witness and service do not accompany a revival of prayer and Bible study, the flames of revival are extinguished, and the embers soon grow cold. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, July 24, 2013)

18. Incredible as it may seem, the Christians went to the temple and private homes every day and did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42) When Stephen was stoned and a terrible persecution broke out against Christians scattering them to the four winds, they went forth preaching and sharing the Word wherever they went. (Acts 8:4)

19. And what do we know about those experiences? Look at the example of Philip, one of the seven deacons. He was instructed to go down to the road leading along the coast from

Jerusalem to Egypt. Read the story in Acts 8:26-38. And what did Philip do?

An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. **The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God's way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

20. God wants to bless us by giving us the opportunity to work with Him. Who would not want to be a partner with God? And in this partnership, there are three essential elements: Bible study, prayer, and witnessing.
21. Let us take a brief, honest inventory. When you have an opportunity to witness for the truth, what do you do? Are you embarrassed to speak up? Do you grasp at any excuse for not speaking up? What does your answer tell you about your personal relationship with your best Friend, Jesus Christ? Moses said he could not speak, and he ended up writing six books of the Bible!
22. Have you had the experience of being led to a place where you met someone who needed the gospel shared with him?

In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 134.

God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, **we must share in His work.** In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—**we must participate in His labors for their redemption.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

23. There seem to be so many urgent things that we need to take care of in this life. We need to support our families. We need to provide homes, transportation, food, clothing, etc. But, if we witnessed as we should and the second coming could be hastened, (2 Peter 3:10-12) just think how much better the food, clothing, shelter, and environment would be—in heaven!
24. Are we embarrassed to witness? Why? Are we afraid of rejection? How often was Jesus rejected? Are we not sure what to say? Do we need a deeper understanding and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?
25. Having the privilege of witnessing to someone and having him become a Christian and join the church, is positively exhilarating. Why don't more Christians try it?
26. What is the relationship between knowing Christ personally and sharing Christ passionately? A Christianity that does not include active Bible study, prayer, and witnessing easily deteriorates into dead formalism.
27. Try to imagine yourself as one of the group gathered in the upper room just before Pentecost. A resurrected Jesus left you about 10 days ago and ascended back to heaven. Maybe the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19,20 are still ringing in your ears. What would you have done?
28. From Acts and his letters, we have a pretty good idea what Paul did. We have a pretty good idea what Peter and Philip did. We do not know very much about the other apostles. What would Paul do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is it impossible for us to have a Paul-like experience because we are just too busy?

If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, and will develop a rich experience.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 80.

29. As we seek to share the truth, it will lead us to a deeper study of the Bible and prayer. In turn, those brighten the flame; and we go back to witnessing again. It is a self-perpetuating process. If we were asked to give a testimonial on the spot regarding some important Christian doctrine, how many of us could do so including with support from the Bible? What will we do when we have to stand singly and alone before authorities on this earth?

When separated from those of like faith and compelled to stand singly and alone to explain their belief, they will be surprised to see how confused are their ideas of what they had accepted as truth. Certain it is that there has been among us a departure from the living God and a turning to men, putting human in place of divine wisdom. (*5 Testimonies* 707.2)

30. God's command to go, teach, and baptize is given to each one of us. God does not wait for us to be qualified. He calls us, and then He qualifies us. We are to make disciples of all nations. Christianity was the first truly international religion; it knows no boundaries. While it is true that Christ was no longer with the disciples personally, He was, in fact, closer to them than if He were present physically. The Holy Spirit was with them wherever they went. And He promised to return.
31. In Matthew 28:19,20, Jesus promised to give us authority; and in Acts 1:8, He promised the power to go with it. With that kind of promise from our Lord, how can we fail? Have you ever felt like you were privileged to share some work with the Holy Spirit? Scan Acts 8-10. Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch. Paul was converted and began his preparation for his work in the Mediterranean world. God gave dreams to Peter, and he converted a Roman centurion. Marvelous things happened. Could we have experiences like any of these? There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the last-day events including the latter rain will be even more generous and more remarkable than was the former rain at Pentecost. Are you looking forward to being a part of that? What could you do to witness to a neighbor, a friend, or a colleague at work? Could your Sabbath School class become a witnessing unit? What would happen if every Seventh-day Adventist church had one active witnessing unit in it? Surely, the gospel could be finished quickly!

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