

It Remains Forever
A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick
2010-07-24

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Location: Clark Fork Seventh-day Adventist Church, ID, USA
Delivery: 2010-07-24
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2010-08-30 22:30Z
Type: Sermon

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Larry Kirkpatrick, "Parenting the Last Generation," ONLINE AT:
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Purification

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you (1 Peter 1:22-25).

First Peter is about believers who, in spite of persecution, follow Jesus closely. They are changed by His gospel. Today, our passage calls us back to this center. In verse 22 Peter addresses believers. He points out that the believer is changed. “Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth.” We are not saved by obedience, but the Bible says that when we obey, the effect is purification.

This word is used seven times in the New Testament. Sometimes it means ceremonial purification (John 11:55; Acts 21:24, 26; 24:18), others, moral purification. We hear it in James 4:8 (Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are to the English Standard Version):

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Cleansing your hands here goes with purifying your heart. In ancient Israel, when a person sinned, there was a way to draw near to God. He took a lamb, went to the sanctuary, and laid his hands on the animal’s head. His sins were transferred to the animal. He took his own knife and slit the throat of the sacrifice. The priest caught the blood in a cup, but animal sacrifice was messy. As soon as possible after the ceremony, the forgiven sinner went and washed the sacrificial blood from knife and hands. James puts this picture before us. It is vivid. What must

the forgiven one have thought as he washed that lifeblood from his hands, knowing that the animal had died because of his decision to sin!

Sinner here goes with double-minded. And it is true; when we sin we are being double-minded. We are wavering, following the flesh more than God's Holy Spirit. But we can repent, change, draw near to God. We can have cleansed hands. If God, through His creative power, is leading us up to a higher experience, He is calling us to step back from double-mindedness, to accept His help. We cooperate, and His Spirit triumphs over our flesh.

In essence, we are called to disown our self-indulgent habits for Jesus. Where does the gospel take us? To where we are double-minded no longer, where hands and hearts are God-cleansed, God purified; to where we are no longer the cause of bloodshed.

We see the word again in 1 John 3:3 KJV:

“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

Who is “He” here? The antecedent—the most recent subject—is Jesus. Every person who has the kind of Christian hope that John is writing about purifies himself even as Jesus is pure. How is Jesus pure? He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). In Him there is no sin (1 John 3:5). First John three is pointing to Jesus' Second Coming. Will there be a likeness to Him at that time? Oh, yes! We will be like Him! He never sinned; through His grace, the word of our Lord, we also will have ceased from sin.

Peter's statement could also be translated, “having reformed your souls.” Before we came to Christ, our lives were deformed; having come to Christ, we have been following the lead of His Holy Spirit. We have been engaged in letting Him bring us to a place where we are reformed.

Some become concerned that the church has standards of behavior, rules, definite expectations. But these are not negative; rather, they are guides to help us in our personal battles to reform. They provide an initial target or goal. Standards are a base camp for those who would climb the spiritual heights.

And why do we engage in this reform, this purification? We came to Christ in recognition of our moral deformity. We are following Jesus and He is taking us to a place of safety, a life in which sin no longer reigns.

His prophet has spoken: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9; 65:25). But Daniel uses the phrase (speaking of God’s holy mountain) to speak of the temple mount (Daniel 9:20) where the sacrifices were offered. Daniel had seen the vision in 8:14 concerning the cleansing of the sanctuary. Here, he looks to the day when sin shall be no more, and when, in consequence, there will be no sacrifices for sin. No longer will they be needed. Jesus’ prayer “Let your will be done on heaven as it is on earth” will be answered. No hurting, no destroying, no killing—no sinning—in all His creation; no selfishness; only love.

Consider the latter portion of this statement:

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart

We want to change because we want to love and be loved. What we have made ourselves by sinning makes it harder for us to be loved and to be loving. We recognize we need to change “for a sincere brotherly love.” What kind of love? The first reference to love in this verse is about *pheeladelpheean*, i.e. brotherly love, the latter (“love each other earnestly from a pure heart”) is *agapee*. Only by living so that we seek to be changed will we be changed and acquire this permanent attitude of unselfish love.

When we imagine that somehow biblical lifestyle standards mean a narrow and legalistic experience, we should look closely at this passage which tells us that the result of being changed, of reflecting more and more the image of Jesus is *agapee* love.

Personal reform is what? a ground for boasting? Not at all. Rather, it is a humbling of oneself, an admission that previous behavior had been like Satan's rather than Jesus' kingdom. To seek change is to admit you were wrong. Pride refuses to admit itself wrong. Or, it will admit being wrong in some trifling sense while at that same time asserting itself mostly right. The disciple of Jesus, quietly engaging in personal reform has nothing to say, nothing to boast. He knows that boasting negates his reward, undermines his experience of humility. He does not come along boasting of his change and compare himself with others; he only compares himself with Jesus. And then Jesus takes him further.

If we do not change we will not love each other earnestly and from a pure heart. But we are Seventh-day Adventists. We want to see Jesus. And we all know that the Word of God, which lives and abides forever, says "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). And Hebrews 12:14: "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." Humble people seek love and holiness because they want to see Jesus. Boasters and proud seek the accolades of other humans because they are more trapped in the here and now than in preparation for eternity.

Laughter

There are two kinds of seed: perishable and imperishable. The best biblical example of perishable seed is Abraham and Sarah. When God came to Abraham and told him plainly that he would have a child, he could not contain himself.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old bear a child?’ (Genesis 17:17).

Abraham, a century into his life journey, had a different idea, one so much more plausible: “And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before you!’” (Genesis 17:18).

The father of the faithful laughed at God’s plan, and said, No God; look how old I am. Let’s do it my way.

In the next chapter, the pre-incarnate Christ, on His way to Sodom and Gomorrah, comes to Abraham at his tent. Sarah is there. Listening inside, she overhears Him telling Abraham that in a year, Sarah will bear him a child. She responds as did Abraham; she laughs (Genesis 18:9-15).

In what terms were Abraham and Sarah thinking? In terms of perishable seed. In our damaged humanity, there are only a limited number of years for child-bearing. It is unheard of for a couple to bear children at 90 or 100. Unheard of, that is, when we think in terms of perishable seed.

But by the word of God, a divine command, life came into being in Sarah’s womb, and a child was born. Abraham was humbled. The living word of God had wrought imperishable seed, and Abraham saw how mistaken he and Sarah had been. He named the child Isaac, which in Hebrew means “laughter” (Genesis 21:1-7).

This figure of birth Peter chooses for his epistle. To the believer, he says, You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but imperishable. It is the Word of God, living and abiding, that has accomplished this. Then, he recalls Isaiah at an interesting place indeed.

He quotes from Isaiah 40:6-8. But we are going to look at it in context. The first five verses of Isaiah 40 are the very lines that John the Baptist understood as his life mission to herald the coming of Jesus.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken' (Isaiah 40:1-5).

To understand this, we need to go back. The invaders had come. The Northern kingdom was gone. All the important cities of Judah had been taken save Jerusalem. But it is surrounded. Rabshakeh, standing with an Assyrian army of 185,000 mocks Israel and the God of Israel. Hezekiah receives the message and sends word to Isaiah the prophet, who is also in the besieged city. The word of God is that He will deliver Israel. An angel of the Lord goes out and in one night kills the entire Assyrian host. Israel is delivered (Isaiah, chs. 36, 37).

Alas, the story does not end there. Hezekiah becomes sick. He is going to die, and pleads with God to lengthen his life. God chooses to do so, and a sign is given. The earth rotates backwards ten steps on the sundial. The ancient world takes notice! Word goes out that the God of the Hebrews did this for Hezekiah. Babylon sends ambassadors. He receives them and proceeds to show them all of the riches of Israel (the Assyrians had not been able to make off with any spoil from Jerusalem). Isaiah, discovering that Hezekiah has shown everything to the Babylonians, prophesies of the inevitable invasion that would come, and all that would befall Israel.

Israel was surrounded, delivered by the word of God, then lapsed back into its materialism. Hezekiah's, and Israel's, great opportunity to give glory to God was wasted on a show and tell about baubles, meaningless dead objects. God had wanted to be their King, but they had rejected Him and insisted on a human one. Now, yet again, they reaped the result of that (See 1 Samuel 8, 12). Isaiah's prophesy, after the recent deliverance, was the more depressing. Israel had failed again.

This is how we get to Isaiah 40. God promises to deliver her after all. A day will come when her warfare is ended. She will reap what she has sown. Then the word of Isaiah 40: Not that the Lord will change, but that the mountains that are in the Lord's way will be brought down. The valleys that humble themselves at His presence will be lifted up. A road will be go straight through the desert. All that would impede God's will will be ended. Here is the word: Those who choose to be purified will be purified; those who choose to stand in stubborn rebellion will be cut down. It is that simple.

The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it. What is the glory of the Lord? In the Tanakh (Old Testament) it is His *kavod*, His heaviness, His riches, that is, His character. Hezekiah showed his *kavod* to Babylon, but God will show His *kavod* to all flesh. How do we know this? Because the mouth of the Lord has spoken it (Isaiah 40:5).

At last we have verses 6-8 as presented in Peter.

For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains for ever (1 Peter 1:24, 25 ESV, quoting Isaiah 40:6-8 LXX).

After this quote, he ties the whole off with the following line: "And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

What is First Peter about? Persecution of God's people. Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, and in the time when First Peter was written, God's people were being persecuted. There was no recourse for them to the state—that was the very agency of persecution! Now the state relies on the best that it has—only perishable seed. But the Christian relies on the best that he has—imperishable seed. The best that flesh can do is shine for a moment; but all that it is, is tinder. Like flowers or grass after a few hot days, the beauty is over. The worst that man can do to us will only be for a season.

Conclusion

We are born again, changed, by the same voice that commanded a planet to turn backwards, by the same voice that delivered Israel and slew 185,000 soldiers as if by a sneeze. By that living and abiding voice, living and abiding word, we are purifying our souls. And this word is the good news that was preached to you. The gospel of God is life-change. The result of changed hearts is that they can love. And “love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Biographical note: Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.