

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Health and Healing

Lesson 8: “The Atmosphere of Praise”

“In the matchless gift of His son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live, and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus” (*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 238).

Several years ago there was an interesting lawsuit in an ecologically aware town in California. Someone was in their house smoking, but the windows were open. A woman walked by, smelled it and sued the smoker for violating a city ordinance banning smoking in public places. In essence, the woman was demanding that everyone in the world was responsible for providing a healthy atmosphere for her. Psychiatrists would call her a “narcissistic co-dependent”. As the center of her universe, her narcissism told her she was worthy to demand that the entire world consider and meet her needs. As a co-dependent she believed she had no responsibility to clean her “atmosphere” by simply walking past the window to avoid the fumes. The world, not her, had to change.

Like the woman in the lawsuit, it is possible for us to have a self-centered attitude toward the instructions regarding healthy living God has given our church. While God wants us to live as healthy as we can on this polluted earth, it is our spiritual atmosphere that is most important. We have no record that Christ ever refused ministry to avoid contamination by the pollution of this earth. Occasionally His Father removed Him from dangerous situations, but of Himself, He lived in the same conditions as the people of His time, traveling as directed by the Holy Spirit. Scripture never records that He “got out of the cities” to live in a more healthful environment. Ellen White counseled that in the last days, if possible we are to leave the big cities, but she also made exception for ministry. Common sense should tell us that if our primary commission is to spread the gospel to the world, we must interact with the world, pollution and all. In conducting public work, especially in our health institutions, she advised us to “act so that the patients will see that Seventh-day Adventists are a people who have common sense” (*Evangelism*, p. 540).

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish (2 Cor. 2:14, 15, KJV).

It is dangerous to refuse clear guidance from the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit arranged circumstances so someone needed to move to a polluted inner city for ministry, is that person entitled to resist because they want to “get out of the cities”? Of course not. Paul tells us in the text above that we are to be a sweet savour of Christ. That means in this world which is polluted. Part of the sacrifice many missionaries are called to make is to live in countries where the sanitation and climate are not ideal.

Christians are here to show a Christ-like atmosphere to the world. In a sermon to the 1888 General Conference session Ellen White explained:

“... What are we in this world for? To represent Christ and to be a blessing to our fellow men. Christ is to be formed in us, the hope of glory. We are to live His life, that our lives may show forth to the world the love of God and the power of the gospel” (Manuscript 17, Oct. 21, 1888).

God through His Holy Spirit changes the lives of willing Christians to demonstrate His power to do that to the world. The one who selfishly thinks the sanctification process is to get “Number One” to heaven cares nothing about demonstrating God’s power to change lives. They focus on continued character improvement to be assured that God feels good toward them. With this motivation it is impossible to demonstrate the gospel’s power, showing the world that it is God that does this. Without realizing it, they show the world that Christians are as self-centered as they are, and that getting to heaven is a selfish every-man-for-himself race of the fittest. Intended or not, we all have an influence with the people around us. When we call ourselves Christian, a follower of Christ, our atmosphere for good is directly related to how completely we submit to the soul-searching changes God wants to make in us.

“The spirit and word and influence you carry are making impressions upon the minds of others. The atmosphere which surrounds the soul, if it is evil, will be like spiritual malaria, which will be poisonous to those around. But it is profitable for the soul to have an atmosphere that will be as a savor of life unto life to others. When the soul is weighted with the truth which works by love and purifies the soul, a heavenly atmosphere will pervade the soul (Letter 70, Jan. 13, 1894, to “Brethren in Responsible Positions in the Review and Herald Office”).

Note the preparation: “the soul is weighted with the truth which works by love ...” It is by being “weighted” or infused with the truth that we produce works of love. This can never be accomplished by doing good things long enough hoping for a heart change. The world watches Christians. It is not possible to fake Christianity all the time. Anyone who has tried to obey God’s law in their own strength knows failure. At some point, if the motivation is phony, the “atmosphere” we generate will break down and someone will be watching.

So is it impossible to live a perfectly obedient life? If gritting our teeth longer and harder fails, do we just give up? In his exposition of Galatians, E. J. Waggoner explained that “disobedience to God’s law is itself the curse” (*The Glad Tidings*, p. 56), not because the law is a curse, but because the curse makes it impossible to abide by *all* the law. Sounds hopeless, but the gospel brings the blessing: “Since the ‘curse’ consists in not continuing in all things that are written in the law, therefore the ‘blessing’ means perfect conformity to the law” (ibid, p. 57).

Praise God it is not hopeless! Conformity to the law is a blessing and all good gifts including blessings come from God. Therefore, we get the blessing of obedience the same as all blessings, we believe and accept that God has done what He said. He assures that He has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3, NASB).

What an atmosphere of praise Christians will generate in the world if they choose to believe God has given us the blessing of obedience! The law is not set aside or ignored, but is perfectly upheld and cherished as the reflection of God’s character. So when we fail, our concern is that God will be misrepresented, not a selfish concern over whether we will make it to heaven. That is the bride unselfishly concerned for her Bridegroom, and that will make her ready.

—Arlene Hill