

THE PRESENT TRUTH

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

The Reason You Exist

I have been shown that many, many confessions should never be spoken in the hearing of mortals; for the result is that which the limited judgment of finite beings does not anticipate. Seeds of evil are scattered in the minds and hearts of those who hear, and when they are under temptation, these seeds will spring up and bear fruit, and the same sad experience will be repeated. For, think the tempted ones, these sins cannot be so very grievous; for did not those who have made confession, Christians of long standing, do these very things? Thus the open confession in the church of these secret sins will prove a savor of death rather than of life. {Testimonies Volume 5, Pg. 645}

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. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10. {Acts of the Apostles Pg. 9}

It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner. They are professedly serving God, but they are more earnestly serving mammon. This half-and-half work is a constant denying of Christ, rather than a confessing of Christ. So many have brought into the church their own unsubdued spirit, unrefined; their spiritual taste is perverted by their own immoral, debasing corruptions, symbolizing the world in spirit, in heart, in purpose, confirming themselves in lustful practices, and are full of deception through and through in their professed Christian life. Living as sinners, claiming to be Christians! Those who claim to be Christians and will confess Christ should come out from among them and touch not the unclean thing, and be separate. . . .

I lay down my pen and lift up my soul in prayer, that the Lord would breathe upon His backslidden people, who are as dry bones, that they may live. The end is near, stealing upon us so stealthily, so imperceptibly, so noiselessly, like the muffled tread of the thief in the night, to surprise the sleepers off guard and unready. May the Lord grant to bring His Holy Spirit upon hearts that are now at ease, that they may no longer sleep as do others, but watch and be sober. {General Conference Bulletin, 1893, pp. 132, 133} are we better 116 years later?

In heaven it is said by the ministering angels: The ministry which we have been commissioned to perform we have done. We pressed back the army of evil angels. We sent brightness and light into the souls of men, quickening their memory of the love of God expressed in Jesus. We attracted their eyes to the cross of Christ. Their hearts were deeply moved by a sense of the sin that crucified the Son of God. They were convicted. They saw the steps to be taken in conversion; they felt the power of the gospel; their hearts were made tender as they saw the sweetness of the love of God. They beheld the beauty of the character of Christ. But with the many it was all in vain. They would not surrender their own habits and character. They would not put off the garments of earth in order to be clothed with the robe of heaven. Their hearts were given to covetousness. They loved the associations of the world more than they loved their God. Solemn will be the day of final decision...

Sad will be the retrospect in that day when men stand face to face with eternity. The whole life will present itself just as it has been. The world's pleasures, riches, and honors will not then seem so important. Men will then see that the righteousness they despised is alone of value. They will see that they have fashioned their characters under the deceptive allurements of Satan. The garments they have chosen are the badge of their allegiance to the first great apostate. Then they will see the results of their choice. They will have a knowledge of what it means to transgress the commandments of God.

There will be no future probation in which to prepare for eternity. It is in this life that we are to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. This is our only opportunity to form characters for the home which Christ has made ready for those who obey His commandments.

The days of our probation are fast closing. The end is near. To us the warning is given, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." Luke 21:34. Beware lest it find you unready. Take heed lest you be found at the King's feast without a wedding garment.

"In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Matt. 24:44; Rev. 16:15. {Christ Object Lesson Pg. 318-319}

The leaders in the Jewish nation had signally failed of fulfilling God's purpose for His chosen people. Those whom the Lord had made the depositaries of truth had proved unfaithful to their trust, and God chose others to do His work. In their blindness these leaders now gave full sway to what they called righteous indignation against the ones who were setting aside their cherished doctrines. They would not admit even the possibility that they themselves did not rightly understand the word, or that they had misinterpreted or misapplied the Scriptures. They acted like men who had lost their reason. What right have these teachers, they said, some of them mere

fishermen, to present ideas contrary to the doctrines that we have taught the people? Being determined to suppress the teaching of these ideas, they imprisoned those who were presenting them. {Acts of the Apostles Pg. 78}

These words were in harmony with the words of Jesus Himself, who, when He arrested Saul on the journey to Damascus, declared: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." Acts 26:16-18.

The purpose which God seeks to accomplish through His people today is the same that He desired to accomplish through Israel when He brought them forth out of Egypt. By beholding the goodness, the mercy, the justice, and the love of God revealed in the Church, the world is to have a representation of His character. And when the law of God is thus exemplified in the life, even the world will recognize the superiority of those who love and serve God above every other people on the face of the earth. The Lord has His eye upon every one of His people, He has His plans concerning each. It is His purpose that those who practice His holy precepts shall be a distinguished people. To the people of God today, as well as to ancient Israel, belong the words written by Moses through the Spirit of inspiration in Deut. 7:6, and 4:5-8. Even these words fail of reaching the greatness and the glory of God's purpose to be accomplished through His people. Not to this world only, but to the universe are we to make manifest the principles of His kingdom. {Australasian Union Conference Record June 1, 1900}

Eternity stretches before us. The curtain is about to be lifted. What are we thinking of, that we cling to our selfish love of ease, while all around us souls are perishing? Have our hearts become utterly callous? Can we not see and understand that we have a work to do in behalf of others? My brethren and sisters, are you among those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not? Is it in vain that God has given you a knowledge of His will? Is it in vain that He has sent you warning after warning of the nearness of the end? Do you believe the declarations of His word concerning what is coming upon the world? Do you believe that God's judgments are hanging over the inhabitants of the earth? How, then, can you sit at ease, careless and indifferent? (Testimonies for the Church Volume Nine Pg. 26)

We must have the habit stronger and stronger to be always thinking of him who is our life, our crown of rejoicing. He has bought us with the price of his own blood. The Lord has a right to claim that all his disciples shall trust him. Let not a doubt be entertained that those who err can be Christ's; Jesus will be our all-sufficient helper, therefore we shall not remain erring, but be enabled to attain to that holiness to which we are called, through close communion with Christ. If we fall short, it will be through unbelief, and that is sin. With God there is no shortcoming in fulfilling his word.

The Purpose of Christ. If our souls are saved at last, we must look to him who has given his rich and abundant promises to be our strength and our salvation. All his approaches to our hearts, all his blessed agencies within, are for our renovation. Thus he would uplift us, and restore in us the moral image of God. The Holy Spirit is promised to illuminate, purify, elevate, and transform all who believe, into the likeness of Christ. He finds in us the spirit of the world, selfishness, pride, and rebellion against God. The Lord Jesus would detach us from the world, and recall us to be his children, and as his children, to obedience, to be doers of his word and will. This is his purpose.

The Will. Truth is omnipotent, but it does not work in the human agent in opposition to the human will. Here is the turning point of freedom and responsibility.

God's Proving. All profit, all pay, our time, our talents, our opportunities, all are to be accounted for him who gives them. He will have the richest reward who loves God supremely and his neighbor as himself. The Lord would not have the first thread of selfishness woven into the fabric of his work. He proves us, to see if our works are free from all selfishness and pride.

The Crisis. We are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Prophecies are fulfilling. The last great conflict will be short, but terrible. Old controversies will be revived; new controversies will arise. We have a great work to do. Our ministerial work must not cease. The last warning must be given to the world. There is a special power in the presentation of the truth at the present time. How long will it last?-- Only a little while. If ever there was a crisis it is now. The inquiry of everyone should be, What am I? To whom do I owe allegiance? Is my heart renewed? Is my soul reformed? Are my sins forgiven? Will they be blotted out when the time of refreshing shall come? {The Gospel Herald, May 14, 1902}

Everyone who is truly converted has the spirit of service. When Christ is indeed formed within, the hope of glory, his Holy Spirit works through the human agent to save other souls for whom he has died. God invites his workers to call upon him for help, and he promises to hear and answer them. As they take up the cross, fully resolved to do what they can, he gives them strength to bear the burden. Why do we not enlist the help of Omnipotence? In these precious days of probation, let every laborer reach forth the hand in faith for the help and strength that will enable him to be a strong worker, in the Lord's vineyard. Let him pray for soundness of judgment and for heavenly wisdom. God is a mighty Helper. He will sustain everyone who trusts in him. He is a sure, tried Anchor, holding his children fast to himself amidst every storm of opposition, every tempest of trial and adversity. When the heavens seem dark, when the strength seems to fail, he will give light and confidence to all who believe in him. To every troubled heart he will speak peace. {The Gospel Herald, December, 10, 1902}

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