

THE PRESENT TRUTH

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

Earthliness Is Great Kindling

While there has been so much fear of excitement and enthusiasm in the service of God, there has been manifest an enthusiasm in another line which to many seems wholly congenial. I refer to the parties of pleasure that have been held among our people. These occasions have taken much of the time and attention of people who profess to be servants of Christ; but have these assemblies tended to the glory of His name? Was Jesus invited to preside over them? Gatherings for social intercourse may be made in the highest degree profitable and instructive when those who meet together have the love of God glowing in their hearts, when they meet to exchange thoughts in regard to the word of God, or to consider methods for advancing His work and doing good to their fellowmen. When nothing is said or done to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, but it is regarded as a welcome guest, then God is honored, and those who meet together will be refreshed and strengthened. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels."

But there has been a class of social gatherings in Battle Creek of an entirely different character, parties of pleasure that have been a disgrace to our institutions and to the church. They encourage pride of dress, pride of appearance, self-gratification, hilarity, and trifling. Satan is entertained as an honored guest, and he takes possession of those who patronize these gatherings.

A view of one such company was presented to me, where were assembled those who profess to believe the truth. One was seated at the instrument of music, and such songs were poured forth as made the watching angels weep. There was mirth, there was coarse laughter, there was abundance of enthusiasm, and a kind of inspiration; but the joy was such as Satan only is able to create. This is an enthusiasm and infatuation of which all who love God will be ashamed. It prepares the participant for unholy thought and action. I have reason to think that some who were engaged in that scene heartily repented of the shameful performance.

Many such gatherings have been presented to me. I have seen the gaiety, the display in dress, the personal adornment. All want to be thought brilliant, and give themselves up to hilarity, foolish jesting, cheap, coarse flattery, and uproarious laughter. The eyes sparkle, the cheek is flushed, conscience sleeps. With eating and drinking and merrymaking, they do their best to forget God. The scene of pleasure is their paradise. And heaven is looking on, seeing and hearing all.

Turn to another scene. In the streets of the city is a party gathered for a bicycle race. In this company also are those who profess to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. But who that looks upon the exciting race would think that those who were thus exhibiting themselves were followers of Christ? Who would think they realized the value of their time and their physical powers as gifts from God, to be preserved for His service? Who thinks of the danger of accident, or that death may be the result of their wild chase? Who have prayed for the presence of Jesus, and the protection of the ministering angels? Is God glorified by these performances? Satan is playing the game of life for these souls, and he is well pleased with that which he sees and hears.

The once earnest Christian who enters into these sports is on the downgrade. He has left the region pervaded by the vital atmosphere of heaven, and has plunged into an atmosphere of mist and fog. It may be that some humble believer is induced to join in these sports. But if he maintains his connection with Christ, he cannot in heart participate in the exciting scene. The words he hears are not congenial, for they are not the language of Canaan. The speakers do not give evidence that they are making melody in their hearts to God. But there is unmistakable evidence that God is forgotten. He is not in all their thoughts. These parties of pleasure and gatherings for exciting sport, made up of those who profess to be Christians, are a profanation of religion and the name of God.

The tenor of the conversation reveals the treasure of the heart. The cheap, common talk, the words of flattery, the foolish witticism, spoken to create a laugh, are the merchandise of Satan, and all who indulge in this talk are trading in his goods. Impressions are made upon those who hear these things similar to that made upon Herod when the daughter of Herodias danced before him. All these transactions are recorded in the books of heaven, and at the last great day they will appear in their true light before the guilty ones. Then all will discern in them the alluring, deceptive workings of the devil, to lead them into the broad road and the wide gate that opens to their ruin.

Satan has been multiplying his snares in Battle Creek, and professed Christians who are superficial in character and religious experience are used by the tempter as his decoys. This class are always ready for the gathering for pleasure or sport, and their influence attracts others. Young men and young women who have tried to be Bible Christians are persuaded to join the party, and they are drawn into the ring. They did not prayerfully consult the divine standard, to learn what Christ has said in regard to the fruit to be

borne on the Christian tree. They do not discern that these entertainments are really Satan's banquet, prepared to keep souls from accepting the call to the marriage supper of the Lamb, . . . preventing them from receiving the white robe of character, which is the righteousness of Christ. They become confused as to what is right for them as Christians to do. They do not want to be thought singular, and naturally incline to follow the example of others. Thus they come under the influence of those who have never had the divine touch on heart or mind.

In these exciting gatherings, carried away by the glamour and passion of human influence, youth that have been carefully instructed to obey the law of God, are led to form attachments for those whose education has been a mistake, and whose religious experience has been a fraud. They sell themselves to a lifelong bondage. As long as they live, they must be hampered [by their union] with a cheap, superficial character, one who lives for display but who has not the precious inward adorning, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price. When sickness and death shall come to those who have lived to please themselves merely, they find that they have provided no oil in their vessels with their lamps, and they are utterly unfitted to close their life's history. This has been; this will continue to be.

We ask of those who have had great light in Battle Creek, Has the truth of God lost its hold upon the soul? Has the fine gold become dim? What has been the cause of this fanaticism and enthusiasm? A fearful accountability rests upon world-loving, selfish parents, for sin lies at their door. How much more favorable it would be if the school buildings that are now in Battle Creek were far off from the city, and separated from so large a colony of professed Sabbathkeepers.

The conviction is gaining ground in the world that Seventh-day Adventists are giving the trumpet an uncertain sound, that they are following in the path of worldlings. Families in Battle Creek are departing from God in planning contracts of marriage with those who have no love for God, with those who have lived a frivolous life, who have never practiced self-denial and know not from experience what it means to be laborers together with God. Strange things are being transacted. False phases of Christianity are being received and taught, which bind souls in deception and delusion. Men are walking in the light of the sparks of their own kindling. Those who love and fear God will not descend to the world's level, in choosing the society of the vain and trifling. They will not become charmed with men or women who are not converted. They are to stand up for Jesus, and then Jesus will stand up for them.

Some of those who know the truth but do not practice it, are trampling upon the law of God in their business transactions. We should have no intimate association with them lest we catch their spirit and share their doom. The patriarch Jacob, when speaking of certain deeds of his sons which he contemplated with horror, exclaimed, "O my soul, come not thou into their secrets; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united." He felt that his own honor would be compromised if he associated with sinners in their doings. He lifts the danger signal, to warn us away from such associations, lest we become partakers of their evil deeds. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, utters a similar warning, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

The eternal God has drawn the line of distinction between the saints and the sinners, the converted and the unconverted. The two classes do not blend into each other imperceptibly, like the colors of the rainbow. They are as distinct as midday and midnight.

Those who are seeking the righteousness of Christ will be dwelling upon the themes of the great salvation. The Bible is the storehouse that supplies their souls with nourishing food. They meditate upon the incarnation of Christ, they contemplate the great sacrifice made to save them from perdition, to bring in pardon, peace, and everlasting righteousness. The soul is aglow with these grand and elevating themes. Holiness and truth, grace and righteousness, occupy the thoughts. Self dies, and Christ lives in His servants. In contemplation of the word, their hearts burn within them, as did the hearts of the two disciples while they went to Emmaus, and Christ walked with them by the way, and opened to them the scriptures concerning Himself.

How few realize that Jesus, unseen, is walking by their side! How ashamed many would be to hear His voice speaking to them, and to know that He heard all their foolish, common talk! And how many hearts would burn with holy joy if they only knew that the Saviour was by their side, that the holy atmosphere of His presence was surrounding them, and they were feeding on the bread of life! How pleased the Saviour would be to hear His followers talking of His previous lessons of instruction, and to know that they had a relish for such holy things! When the truth abides in the heart, there is no place for criticism of God's servants, or for picking flaws with the message He sends. That which is in the heart will flow from the lips. It cannot be repressed. The things that God has prepared for those that love Him will be the theme of conversation. The love of Christ is in the soul as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, sending forth living streams that bring life and gladness wherever they flow. {Manuscript Release Volume 14, 119-125}