

2. Not Holier Than Thou

By John Thiel, *Seeking to Please God Series*, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We are continuing our series to examine ourselves according to the counsel of God's word applicable to the time of the judgment, which tells us to afflict our souls.

We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the few remaining days of their probation, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance. There must be deep, faithful searching of heart. {GC 489.3}

This is what we are doing as we pass through each subject of this series on *seeking to please God*. We are seeking to afflict our souls in this day of judgment so that we will please God. In Hebrews 13 God says that He will make us perfect in every good work to do His will, *working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ*. Jesus Christ is the avenue through which we are to examine ourselves. As we saw previously, the first thing we have to examine is whether Jesus is in me; because without Jesus in me I will not see myself as I really am. And then, through Jesus Christ, we will be brought to receive His working, working in us that which is well-pleasing In His sight.

Close Self-Examination

What shall I say to arouse the remnant people of God? . . . I warn all who profess the name of Christ to closely examine themselves and make full and thorough confession of all their wrongs, that they may go beforehand to judgment, and that the recording angel may write pardon opposite their names. {Mar 57.2}

So this is the practical present truth. We are to do this work of examining our souls closely, and make full confession of all our wrongs so that they will go beforehand to judgment and so that the recording angel may write pardon opposite our names.

The Bible is very explicit in reference to this hour of God's judgment for God's people. People often think that, God's people don't need to have the judgment; only the wicked will have the judgment. But it says it plainly in the following scripture:

1 Timothy 5:24 Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some [men] they follow after.

It is upon God's people that the judgment commences. These "some men" are the people of God whose sins *are open beforehand, going before to judgment*. So we are spending these meditations to search where our sins are, so that we will send them beforehand to judgment by confession, so that they can be open and confessed and erased from the books of record.

Inspecting the Pattern

By carefully and closely searching His word we shall obey the injunction of Christ, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." This search enables the student to observe closely the divine Model, for they testify of Christ. {CSW 17.1}

We are to search out the Scriptures to explore the divine Model.

The Pattern must be inspected often and closely in order to imitate it. As one becomes acquainted with the history of the Redeemer, he discovers in himself defects of character; his unlikeness to Christ is so great that he sees he cannot be a follower without a very great change in his life. {Ibid.}

This is what we are to do—searching the Scriptures and searching our hearts. And by beholding the Model, by being illuminated, our experience is similar to when you let the sun shine through a window. At first you think the window is quite clear, but when the sun shines on it, all of a sudden you discover all the murk on it. So it is when the Sun of righteousness shines into our soul; when we are wrapped up with Jesus, then all the spots and imperfections are revealed. Our unlikeness to Christ is so great that we see we cannot be followers of Him without a very great change in our life. But instead of saying, Ugh, I'm so terrible;

Still he studies, with a desire to be like his great Exemplar; {Ibid.}

He doesn't give up;

...he catches the looks, the spirit, of his beloved Master; by beholding he becomes changed. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." {Ibid.}

So we will continue to look at Jesus and through Him realise what needs to be corrected in our life as we proceed through these series. But we will not do this without a relationship with Jesus. If we have not this relationship, we will keep on searching for the details. But keep on studying. And the more we see, the more we will feel we are unworthy. Our comeliness will be turned in us into corruption; but we will keep on studying so that we may be changed into that image by the studying.

Jesus is the Word, and the Word was made flesh. As we search through the Word, let the Word be made flesh in us; let the Word produce what Jesus came in His person to reveal.

What is our search today? What is the subject matter that we are to examine in the Word so that we may discover whether or not there is some spot or blemish that needs to be opened up before us so that we can confess it and it can be pardoned, as we confess it to the Lord?

A Smoke in God's Nostrils

Isaiah 65:1 I am sought of [them that] asked not [for me]; I am found of [them that] sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation [that] was not called by my name. 2 I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way [that was] not good, after their own thoughts;

We are looking for God's ways which are higher than men's ways; and here is a direct reference to this—a people that are walking in a way that was not God's way, a way that was not the good way; it was a way of their own thoughts. God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*; but they were following their thoughts. Then He makes reference to these people which are a rebellious people, walking in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts, and says of them:

Isaiah 65:5 Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.

This is the description of a people that are there before Him.

Isaiah 66:5 ...These [are] a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

In the books of heaven the character of these people is written. God has a perfect photograph of every man's character; and it is a smoke in His nose; it is not pleasing to Him.

Isaiah 65:6 Behold, [it is] written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom,

So if this sin is not erased, as it is written before Him, then there is a recompense; then probation is closed, and their doom is set. Here we are now, our sins that are a smoke before Him must be erased from those books. It is something that is not pleasing Him. So as we read that, we may think, He was writing about the Hebrews, the Israelites. But is not this exactly what the Laodicean message is? The people of Laodicea, who think they are quite alright, say, Stand back; I am the chosen people of God; we are *the people of the judgment*. This is the meaning of Laodicea. They know it all so well; and they are doing exactly what is written here in Isaiah.

The True Witness here writes to the angel of the church of Laodicea, to the ministry:

Revelation 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

It is a similar term to the smoke up His nostrils; it makes Him sick. Why?

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;

That mentality is the same as saying, We are God's people; stand back, we are holier than thou.

Revelation 3:17 ...and [thou] knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

Can you see the parallel between Isaiah 65 and the Laodicean people? This is the same description. "I am holier than thou; I am alright; I am following what I know is written in the Bible (but according to my thoughts)." This is what I have seen in the ministry time and time again—people reading the word of God from their own perspective, not from God's perspective. Therefore Jesus says, You say you are rich and increased with goods, but you don't know... and I am trying to open up to you something you don't know. This is what He is saying

so that they would repent, because He is a loving God; He doesn't want them to be destroyed.

Is This Me?

How is this condition of "holier than thou" portrayed, so we can examine ourselves? Does this refer to me in any way? We are examining our hearts.

Closely examine your own heart as in the light of eternity. Hide nothing from your examination. Search, oh! search, as for your life, and condemn yourself, pass judgment upon yourself, and then by faith claim the cleansing blood of Christ to remove the stains from your Christian character. Do not flatter or excuse yourself. Deal truly with your own soul. And then as you view yourself a sinner, fall, all broken, at the foot of the cross. Jesus will receive you, all polluted as you are, and will wash you in His blood, and cleanse you from all pollution, and make you fit for the society of heavenly angels, in a pure, harmonious heaven. There is no jar, no discord, there. All is health, happiness, and joy. {Mar 57.4}

Here is an encouraging message. We are to examine ourselves; and as we do so, being honest with ourselves, and falling all broken at the foot of the cross, Jesus will receive us. And did you notice? It says I am to examine *myself*, and to not flatter and excuse myself as I search out this particular point. Am I at all affected by a holier-than-thou mentality? As Seventh-day Adventists, as the people of the judgment, with all our knowledge of what is right and proper, as revealed in God's word, how easy it is to fall into this danger of "holier than thou".

All who claim to be Sabbath-keeping Adventists, and yet continue in sin, are liars in God's sight. Their sinful course is counterworking the work of God. They are leading others into sin. The word comes from God to every member of our churches, "And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. ..." [Hebrews 12:13-17]. {19MR 177.1}

Will the churches heed the Laodicean message? Will they repent, or will they, notwithstanding that the most solemn message of truth--the third angel's message--is being proclaimed to the world, go on in sin? This is the last message of mercy, the last warning to a fallen world. If the church of God becomes lukewarm, it does not stand in favor with God any more than do the churches that are represented as having fallen and become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird. Those who have had opportunities to hear and receive the truth and who have united with the Seventh-day Adventist church, calling them-

selves the commandment-keeping people of God, and yet possess no more vitality and consecration to God than do the nominal churches, will receive of the plagues of God just as verily as the churches who oppose the law of God. Only those that are sanctified through the truth will compose the royal family in the heavenly mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those that love Him and keep His commandments. {19MR 176.1}

The Laodicean people preach about the fallen Babylon around them. They repeat the message, “*Babylon is fallen*”, the message of the second angel. The message is that all the other churches are Babylon; and it says that they will be rejected of God. But, as we read it here, with that thinking that “they are all fallen, and we are God’s church”, there is here a mentality that is as bad as that of fallen Babylon. So with this idea of applying God’s word to myself to say that I am God’s people, but not applying God’s word to show me how sinful I am, I am no better than those that are Babylon. This is a serious thing. In other words, what Adventists (and us if we are not careful) are prone to do, is taking the word that suits me and judging others by the word that tells them where they are wrong; but not applying it to myself. So as I am searching my heart, there is a particular condition that I need to search out, that is, whether or not I have this attitude that is Laodicean, this mentality that says, “I am alright; I have all these wonderful messages; I have a distinctive condition; I am holier than everybody else.” And everything I read, I read to let the other people know that they are not right; but I am right. Can you see what this condition of mind is? This is the most serious danger affecting all Seventh-day Adventists and reforming Seventh-day Adventists alike.

It is a mentality that makes us use the distinctive messages that we have and think of someone else instead of me. We come across a powerful correction, a powerful rebuke, and we think, Wow, this applies exactly to this person. And then another statement comes to us, and we think, Oh! That really belongs to this person. Then we come to church with a mind that is interested to hear what God’s word says; but the moment something is being made obvious to my mind, I think, Oh yeah, I’ve seen it in that person; etc. This is a mentality that we are in grave danger of harbouring. It is a mentality that we need to watch very closely, because this is a smoke in God’s nose.

Am I Doing That?

Especially as reformers, we are searching the word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy, and we read all the minute details that Sister White has been commissioned to communicate.

In a view given me about twenty years ago [1871], "I was then directed to bring out general principles, in speaking and in writing, and at the same time specify the dangers, errors, and sins of some individuals, that all might be warned, reproved, and counseled. I saw that all should search their own hearts and lives closely to see if they had not made the same mistakes for which others were corrected and if the warnings given for others did not apply to their own cases. If so, they should feel that the counsel and reproofs were given especially for them and should make as practical an application of them as though they were especially addressed to themselves. {CCh 91.5}

Can you see a problem when we read Sister White's writings? The problem is that if we have this aptitude to read something and say, Wow, what she is writing there I can really see it applying to that person; then we are already on the wrong track, because it was not written for me to do that. It was written for me to examine myself to see whether it was not something she was writing about me. And this is what I have experienced in the ranks of reformers and Seventh-day Adventists; they use Sister White's writings to hammer other people and point out to them where they are wrong, and they cannot see that it really applies to themselves. This is what we need to examine closely. Am I doing that? Am I reading Sister White's writings to hear what she is saying about others, instead of seeing whether or not she is writing that to me? How easy it is; I've seen this time and time again—using Sister White's writings to tell other people where they are wrong, instead of realising it applies to me.

God's Testing

God designs to test the faith of all who claim to be followers of Christ. He will test the sincerity of the prayers of all those who claim to earnestly desire to know their duty. He will make duty plain. He will give all an ample opportunity to develop what is in their hearts. {CCh 91.6}

Through the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy that we are exposed to as Seventh-day Adventists reformers, God is writing things regarding which we are in danger of thinking, "Oh, that was that person's problem;" and "the people I see are exactly like that; it's a description of the problems I see around me." And I miss the point of reading it about myself. My heart is saying, *I am holier than thou.*

Doing Satan's Work

Remember, we are seeking to please God; but

The Lord is not pleased with His people when they neglect to criticize their own soul, criticizing others instead. This is Satan's work. When you do this work, remember that the enemy is using you as a means of tempting others, in order that those who should be united in harmony and joy, building up one another in the most holy faith, shall be warring and complaining because some one else is sinning. {OHC 233.3}

Can you see what this is doing? Haven't we experienced just this? We are not pleasing God when we neglect to criticise ourselves, when we neglect to read God's word to apply it to ourselves and we apply it to others and criticise others instead. This is Satan's work. And what happens when you do this work? *The enemy is using you as a means of tempting others, in order that those who should be united in harmony and joy, building up one another in the most holy faith, shall be warring and complaining because someone else is sinning.*

Christ has not made you a sin bearer. You cannot even bear your own sin. Therefore be very careful not to take up any reproach against your neighbor. {Ibid.}

It means just this, that we take the correction that is meant to go for me and we apply it to someone else that I can see is doing the same thing that I am doing; but I am not recognising that I am doing it, because that is what the Laodicean mentality is. I don't see that I am wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked; but I can see it in the others. This is a terrible sin that creates disruption of beautiful harmony and joy among God's church. Can we see what we need to confess? We should be building up one another, not criticising the other person. Because this is what we are doing. As I talk about other people in the church who are faulty, and who are not doing what we know is written, I am actually creating a rift within the church. I am doing this.

Christ has not made you a sin bearer. You cannot even bear your own sin. Therefore be very careful not to take up any reproach against your neighbor. God wants His people to be free. . . . Shall we not remember that by the words we speak we may either wound or heal? Shall we not remember that as we judge, so we shall be judged, we who perhaps have had many more opportunities than those whom we judge? {Ibid.}

Our hearts must be melted into tenderness and love for one another. We may criticize ourselves just as severely as we please. The one who criticizes another gives evidence that he is the very one who needs to criticize himself. {OHC 233.4}

Take that on board. The one who notes the faults of another, who uses Sister White's writings to illuminate the other's faults, as he criticises another he gives evidence that he is the very one who is to criticise himself. You really let this sink in, and you will realise, Oops... This stops all discussion about other people. It stops it when you let that sink in.

Pray God to show you what you must remove from yourselves in order that you may see the kingdom of God.... {*Ibid.*}

Here is something we are to examine ourselves on, because it is written there, and it is a smoke in His nose; it is not pleasing to Him. We are to cease that, as we see it so beautifully expressed in the quote above. It would cease creating rifts in the church when we would cease doing that, when we would confess that.

Taking Care of Our Own Garden

Those who take it upon themselves to watch their neighbor's garden instead of weeding their own plot of ground will surely find their own gardens so grown up to weeds that every precious plant will be crowded out. {5T 285.2}

Are we watching other people's gardens? Are we watching other people's characters? Are we using Sister White's writings as is typically done in the ranks of so many Adventists, and then shattered experiences take place and people blame the Spirit of Prophecy for it? This has happened in my experience time and time again. People find that E. G. White's writings are so condemning and they cause so many problems in the church that they turn away from the Spirit of Prophecy, when it is really *their* mistake that they are applying it to others instead of applying it to themselves. This is a serious problem, and we are to examine whether or not I am doing that, and to confess that, and let it be removed so that it is not a smoke in God's nostrils anymore; so that what is written before Him is confessed and eradicated—blotted out. This is the message for this hour.

As we proceed into the detailed search of all that is to follow in this series, not for one moment are we to fall into the trap that what the brother is sharing now applies to this and that person. Let us get rid of that entirely as we proceed, because we are going to search deeply every other truth of the Bible that we are to examine ourselves by; and if I am doing this, I am immediately falling into the trap of Satan. And I don't want to go any further in this series if we are going to be in the danger of falling into that. We are to concentrate on that fact that what we are doing is searching our own hearts, not the heart of another person; we are criticising our own selves as we discover what is being revealed to me; and I

just try to uplift my brothers and sisters, and I enrich their experience by *my* confession and *my* testimony of what the Lord is doing for *me*, concentrating on Jesus and I, my personal Saviour. It is a personal Saviour that I am looking to; and as I look to Him personally, He reveals to me *my* sins, not the other people's. And as I confess them to Him and He touches me with His mercy, I am able to uplift others. This is how this works.

So we are not to fall into the trap of the typical reformer mentality. You know what you call that mentality? Bigotry. To be a bigot is to be someone who judges other people around him by all the high standards that he believes he should tell them about; standing in such a manner towards people that it makes them shrivel, because you let them know how wrong they are, and how right you are. This is what this subject is about. And as we learn to do what is right, we are to concentrate on confessing *our own* sins, criticising ourselves, and refusing to criticise others.

God grant us this, that we will truly be released from this terrible danger.

Amen.