

Our Greatest Need, Part 2

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Clairemont Seventh-day Adventist Church April 27, 2013

Remember that last week we mentioned a dream that Ellen White had in which an angel stood at the gate of the golden city, the New Jerusalem. Only one question was asked of those who wanted entrance. Do you remember what the question was? It was, "Have you received the Holy Spirit?" The reception of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to our salvation and spiritual growth

Let's take a quick review of what we studied last Sabbath. We saw last week that the Holy Spirit was active at Creation, as reported in Genesis 1. We saw that the teaching of the Godhead is explicit in Genesis 1:2, which reports that the Spirit was "hovering" over the globe in its condition of being "without form and void" and in "darkness." This verse not only describes the physical creation of the world, but also the spiritual re-creation of the Christian. God's Spirit is still "hovering" over the face of the world, waiting to take those whose lives are in "darkness" and are "without form and void" and bring beauty and order. We saw that the teaching of the Godhead is implicit in the usage of the name "Elohim," the name for God in Genesis 1:1, which is in the plural form, meaning "three or more," according to the rules of Hebrew grammar. Later in Genesis 1 we found plural pronouns used when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image."

Is the teaching of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2 of Genesis? Yes! How was it that Adam came to life? It was when God knelt and breathed into his nostrils the breath or "Spirit" of life that man became a living soul. We'll speak more about this later, but for now, note that along with Genesis 1, this verse describes something literal, the physical creation of the body Adam, but it also illustrates at least two other things in the spiritual realm: the creation of the body of Christ, the church, when God "breathed" into them on the day of Pentecost, and secondly, the creation of God's Word. The content of the Holy Bible, through the process of "inspiration" (which means "breathed into") is not merely words written by man. Yes, it's paper and ink, but under the Lord's guidance, this became the living oracles of God, the Scriptures that Paul called "God-breathed."

In chapter 3 of Genesis the Holy Spirit is the "enmity," the Voice of conscience that was put in place to restrict the activities and influence of Satan, who thought that he had gained unlimited control of the world and of the human family when Adam and Eve fell. "No," the Lord said to him, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." If He had not done that, the earth would have become totally uninhabitable and mankind would have destroyed itself in short order. The grand experiment

anticipated by divine wisdom designed to contrast good as against evil, to bring about the provision for salvation through Christ, would never have happened. So, God put a limitation on Satan's power and gave to mankind the capacity to say "no" to his inducements through divine power bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

What a gift! Without the insertion of that priceless Gift, mankind would have been helpless to recognize Satan's deceptions and man would have had no ability to resist his temptations. What does the Bible say about the condition of man's heart in sin? It says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9. Take careful note: it doesn't say the heart of Hitler, Jeffrey Dahmer or the heart of Charles Manson or some other notorious madman. It says "the heart," meaning, "my heart." In my natural condition, devoid of God's Spirit, my heart is "desperately wicked." It may not be a complimentary or flattering thought, but it's the naked truth. That's why we need to receive the Holy Spirit, each and every day!

Without His Spirit, man (this man) would have had no desire to follow godly principles, but would have been content to live out the desires of the flesh as he walked the road to perdition. But God put a check on Satan's influence, the wondrous Gift of the Spirit, by which man can by His grace resist the power of the devil and be reformed into the image of God, the image in which man was created but which was marred by sin. Man's heart can be changed so that instead of loving sin, he can actually hate evil. The "enmity" would become the reprogrammed circuitry of his brain, thus securing the safety of the universe in the great hereafter. To disobey will become unthinkable. In this way God's original proclamation, "Let Us make man in Our image" is still His objective!

But at the end of time, after being resisted persistently by the world (take careful note; this is not speaking of God's children, the righteous. They will be at this time filled with the Spirit. The 5 wise maidens in Matthew 25 did have oil in their lamps when the Bridegroom came.) God's Spirit will be withdrawn, throwing the planet into the chaos of the "time of trouble such as never was" coupled with the outpouring of the seven last plagues of Revelation 16. In this way, after the grand experiment has come to its close; after the demonstration of the principles of righteousness have been contrasted with the principles of wickedness, God will then allow the universe to see what life on this planet under Satan's control would have been like all along, had He not put a check on Satan's influence. God couldn't allow that at first, because there would have been no life on this planet if Satan had unlimited power.

At the end, when the story of sin has been told and retold, God will remove His restraining Spirit and Satan will be only too happy to

destroy and wreak havoc. For the believer, for the faithful one, Psalm 91 will be experienced. "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my Refuge, even the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee; neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all Thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

About 50 miles north, going up highway 5, is San Onofre, where a nuclear power generation plant is located. Many of you have driven past it, I'm sure. It's possible some of you may have worked there. Though I'm not a scientist, I'll do my best to explain what's happening there, and tie to it a spiritual lesson that is illustrated by it. Within each of those domes there is a miniature atomic bomb at work. Nuclear fuel decomposes and sends off miniature missiles which break apart other atoms of unstable matter, releasing energy which heats water into steam which drives generators to produce electricity. If the chain reaction is allowed to continue, it can reach what is called "critical mass," meaning that an atomic explosion is imminent.

On May 21, 1946 scientist Louis Slotin was doing a very dangerous experiment in Los Alamos. With a screwdriver he was moving components of the nuclear process, keeping them just far apart so that it remained in control. But then his screwdriver slipped, and the parts collapsed together. Realizing the danger, with his hands he immediately pried apart the pieces, no doubt saving the lives of the other 7 scientists who were observing the experiment. But 9 days later Slotin died of radiation poisoning. The chain reaction had become deadly for him.

In a nuclear reactor a modified chain reaction is taking place, but the chain reaction is not allowed to progress unchecked. How is it controlled? Carbon rods are inserted amongst the fuel supply which absorb some of these "bullets," restricting the rate of progress of the chain reaction taking place. Those rods can be elevated or lowered, thus monitoring the acceleration progress and preventing the process to reach "critical mass," the point when it would be uncontrollable and result in an explosion. With that overly-simplified explanation in place, allow this to illustrate what happened on Planet Earth, both in the beginning of the story and at its end.

When mankind fell, it began a "chain reaction" of iniquity, which if unchecked would have escalated into a weapon of mass destruction. This is what Satan had hoped for and anticipated. But in Genesis 3, when the Lord visited the Garden, He said, "I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman (Eve and her descendants)." This is describing the ministry of the Holy Spirit, bringing a limitation on Satan's influence. The power of the Holy Spirit is reflected in the "control rods" in a nuclear reactor, preventing the chain reaction of sin from reaching critical mass. But someday God will remove His gracious Spirit.

The "control rods" will be withdrawn, and the universe will see what life under the domination of sin and Satan would have been like all along. Thank God for His Spirit! Thank God for the "enmity" He placed between the serpent and the woman!

Continuing our look at the Spirit in the Old Testament story, we see that the Spirit was active throughout those generations between Adam and Noah. Sadly for the most part they pushed away His influences toward righteousness and instead cultivated wickedness. A culture of violence and immorality, debauchery and decadence prevailed. Does that sound familiar?

A most important aspect of what the Bible reveals concerning the Spirit is brought to view in the Flood story, when the Lord told Noah, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." Genesis 6:3. There is a point beyond which we cannot receive His help; not because God's love has been exhausted, but because we've developed a callous on our spiritual ear and have built up resistance so strong that we are out of range of hearing His voice. What is the name that the Bible uses to describe this hopeless condition? It calls it the "unpardonable sin."

God's patience is long; His forbearance mighty. But there is a limit to even divine tolerance. The world in Noah's day reached that point, and before Jesus returns our present world will likewise have passed that unseen barrier. Those outside the door of the ark had reached that fateful boundary. His Voice is soft and sweet; pray that you never turn away His loving voice! Listen to Paul's advice: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (by the way, this text confirms that God's Spirit is a Person, not just the power or force of God), by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30.

God's Spirit was active at creation, at the Fall, at the time of the Flood and at the time of the Exodus, all major events in the story of Planet Earth. We're told that those who fabricated the wilderness tabernacle were imbued with a special measure of God's Spirit in order to do their work. "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship.'" Exodus 31:1-5. What a beautiful illustration and lesson is this! What was the object of their artistry? It was the sanctuary, the tabernacle, wasn't it.

The New Testament has much to say about Spiritual gifts; those talents and abilities given by God for the purpose of building up the tabernacle of the church. Romans 12, I Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4 speak about spiritual gifts. But see this parallel: we should note that this teaching of spiritual gifts for the purpose of building up the church has its root in the Old Testament. Bezaleel and his associate Aholiab, along with the others who worked with them, were endowed with special abilities by the Spirit ("gifts of the Spirit") in order to build the tabernacle of the Lord. Doesn't the New Testament tell us about "building" or "edifying" the church through Spirit-endowed gifts of ministry? What we read in the book of Acts, such as the amazing ability to speak in other languages or healing miracles that caused the church to grow was foreshadowed 15 centuries before when God filled Bezaleel with His Spirit in order to fashion the sanctuary.

Nor were these gifts given on a temporary basis. Centuries after they entered Canaan these gifts of the Spirit still clung to their descendants who became sought-after artisans when Solomon constructed the more permanent structure of worship. We're told in Exodus 31:6 that Aholiab was of the tribe of Dan. So it was that from among the descendants of Aholiab that masons and craftsmen were selected for the building project in Solomon's day, some 400 years later. Hiram, king of Tyre, responded to Solomon's request for help by saying, "I have sent a skillful man endowed with understanding, Hiram my master craftsman (the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan)." II Chronicles 2:13. Hundreds of years later those talents were still present within the family line of Aholiab of the tribe of Dan.

But here's a note of sadness. While the wilderness tabernacle was assembled with a conscious spirit of willing generosity, so much so that Moses had to eventually restrain them from giving more, that was not the same spirit that filtered through the encampment when it came time to build the house of the Lord in Solomon's time. In fact, we'd say today that the workers "struck for higher wages." Greed and avarice tarnished the beauty of that edifice. How sad when those who have been endowed by God with talents for ministry begin to think that they have acquired them by their own doing and demand higher remuneration for their services. This is the spirit of selfishness that Satan is imbuing in labor unions by which he intends to bind together his captives for destruction. It is not the spirit of Christ that leads to labor strikes and disruption.

Is it possible that mistake could be repeated in our church? Consider this thought: there was a time when the concept of remuneration in our church for all its workers was on a "missionary scale." That is, one received compensation not in accordance with their talent, education or experience, but they received a "fair living wage," which if managed skillfully could pay ones bills. When I was first hired Brother Rudy Fuss sat me down in his office and his first words were, "We're not

paying you what you're worth." As our church began to grow, outreach through medical missionary work became a successful approach to winning souls. Seventh-day Adventists became known for their practice of sound wisdom in health matters and preventative medicine. Health institutes and medical schools began to flourish.

The doctors who graduated from these schools held the lofty title of "medical missionary." One of the schools from which they graduated was called the "College of Medical Evangelists," a name in keeping with its spiritual objectives. This was later replaced by the indistinct name "Loma Linda University." Back in the early days, these medical evangelists were paid the same amount as the ministers. They were both sharers of the Gospel; the minister sharing through the Word, the doctor through healing. The Lord blessed this church with unusual wisdom in the field of physiology, health and medicine. God-inspired industries were developed the proceeds of which to advance the Gospel. Today few people know the history of how corn flakes or peanut butter were born.

The truth of it is that God favored His people not only with intelligence that would bring blessing to the world in the form of godly health principles, but that would finance the spread of the Gospel to all the world. The health food industry and the health institutes would create revenue that would support the proclamation of the Gospel and the last day truths God wants the world to hear before Jesus comes back. But the golden opportunity, for the better part, we allowed to slip through our fingers. Though God gave these concepts and abilities to His people, Satan has hijacked them, and the connection between the health food industry and the Three Angels' Messages has been lost.

Today the medical world has come to recognize the beneficial effects of a diet absent of flesh foods, animal fats, excessive sugar and salt. "Going vegan" has become much in vogue, even among some of those of the New Age movement and the jet-setters of Hollywood. But Adventists were given these concepts a century and half ago! Today, the "world" has stolen the "thunder" of healthful living, and Adventists don't receive the attention that God intended through the teaching of true health principles. Back then, Seventh-day Adventists were known as the ones on the cutting edge of medicine, offering the very finest and most up-to-date treatments. The most famous and influential people of the world, including presidents of the United States, entered the doors of those health institutes.

Unfortunately, through the process of time, a different philosophy began to take root. Doctors, seeing what physicians on the "outside" made, began to slide away from the denomination pay scale and demand remuneration commensurate with their colleagues in the world. Hospital administrators used to be paid on the same missionary basis, but not anymore. How sad that the Gifts of the Spirit would be used to foster

selfishness!

How sad that the Gifts of the Spirit, given to build the tabernacle, would be turned completely upside down and become a tool of the devil, to tear down the church and build the synagogue of Satan! Let's sit in on an imaginary conversation between Bezaleel and someone who's traveled quite a distance to ask him a question. Let's listen. "Mr. Bezaleel, I understand that you have unusual talent in temple construction. I've heard that you are a genius in carving objects and designing tapestries. You're just the person we're looking for! We're right now in the process of planning a brand new temple for Baal up here in Syria. We'll offer you a handsome salary to work on it with us, much more than you received in the project you just finished. What do you say?" Answer "A" might be, "No thank you! The talents I have are a direct gift from Jehovah God, to be used in the building of His house of worship. It would be sacrilege to use them to build a temple for Baal!" Answer "B" might be, "Your offer sounds pretty good. I guess it wouldn't be so terrible if I worked for you for a while. I could always come back and do more work for Jehovah if He needs me."

The gift of music is one of the greatest gifts ever given to mankind. How many have been blessed with voices with which to praise God, who have used them to praise the enemy of God! How many began by singing in the church choir who then were drawn by the neon lights of the world and abandoned their spiritual roots for a heavier purse. Names that come to mind include Elvis Presley and Aretha Franklin. We're told that the artist known as Prince and Ozzie Osborne were both raised in Seventh-day Adventist homes. We're informed that the group "Black Sabbath," of which Osborne was leader, took their name because of his Seventh-day Adventist upbringing.

Modern-day Bezaleels and Aholiab, gifted with unusual talents to build the sanctuary have turned the gifts into a curse, offering praise instead to Satan. I was having a conversation one time with whose name would probably be familiar to some of you because he's sung on 3ABN often and was featured in some of our major evangelistic efforts. It was with keen disappointment that I that heard him say that he routinely collects about \$2,500.00 a night to sing popular love ballads in nightclubs and lounges. Where are you, Bezaleel? Stand up, Aholiab! Whatever gift He has given to you; whatever talent you have, use it wisely! Use it for God! Use it to build up His kingdom!

Our greatest need is to be filled with the Spirit; to be changed from within, to be recreated in His image. The Spirit today is "hovering," "fluttering" over your heart and mine seeking entrance. He is leading us to righteousness through conviction, repentance and faith. He is there to empower us against the enemy. "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him." Isaiah

59:19. He is ready to give us gifts, talents and abilities which can be used to build up His tabernacle.

All we need to do is ask, and be willing to open our hearts to Him. Will you receive Him today? Will you covenant to spend time each day in His sacred writings, the "God-breathed" scriptures which will lead you to a friendship with Jesus?