

Seeing *the* Goldsmith's Face



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 23:1–10, Dan. 12:1–10, Matt. 5:16, 25:1–12, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10, 4:11–16.*

Memory Text: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV).

Amy Carmichael took a group of children to a traditional goldsmith in India. In the middle of a charcoal fire was a curved roof tile. On the tile was a mixture of salt, tamarind fruit, and brick dust. Embedded in this mixture was gold. As the fire devoured the mixture, the gold became purer. The goldsmith took the gold out with tongs and, if it was not pure enough, he replaced it in the fire with a new mixture. But each time the gold was replaced, the heat was increased. The group asked, “How do you know when the gold is purified?” He replied, “When I can see my face in it.”—Amy Carmichael, *Learning of God* (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989), p. 50.

God is seeking to purify us, to refine us like gold, to transform us into His image. That's an astonishing goal, and it seems even more astonishing that a Christlike character is developed in us only as we pass through life's crucibles.

The Week at a Glance: What role does suffering have in the purifying process? How do we understand all this in the context of the great controversy?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 27.*

“In His Image”

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29, NKJV).

In the beginning, God made us in His image (*Gen. 1:27*), but that image has been corrupted by sin.

In what ways do we see this defacing of God’s image in humanity?

It’s obvious: We all have been corrupted by sin (*Rom. 3:10–19*). Yet, God’s desire is to restore us to what we should have originally been. This is where our text today fits in. It reveals God’s plan that for those who submit their lives to the Holy Spirit, they may be “conformed to the likeness of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*).

But there’s another dimension. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

How do you understand what Ellen White says to us in that quote?
See also Job 1, Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10.

As Christians, we must never forget that we are in the midst of a cosmic drama. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is unfolding all around us. The battle takes many shapes and is manifested in many ways. And though much is hidden, we can understand that, as followers of Christ, we have a part to play in this drama, and we can bring honor to Christ through our lives.

Imagine being on the field of a huge stadium. Sitting in the bleachers on one side are heavenly beings loyal to the Lord; on the other side are beings who have fallen with Lucifer. If your life for the past 24 hours was played out on that field, which side would have more to cheer about? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Faith Amid the Refining Fire

It's one thing to be in a battle; it's another not even to see the forces arrayed in that battle. In a sense, this is what we as Christians deal with. We know that the forces are out there, we can feel them in our lives, and yet, we have to press ahead in faith, trusting Him "who is invisible" (*Heb. 11:27, NKJV*).

Read Job 23:1–10. What is the essence of Job's struggle? What does he not see? At the same time, what does he take on faith, despite all his trials?

Even amid his terrible trials, Job trusted in the Lord. Despite everything, Job was determined to endure. And one of the things that kept him persevering was gold. Not a gold medal; rather, he was looking into the future and realized that if he held on to God, he would come out the better for it—he would come out like gold. How much Job knew of what was happening behind the scenes, we aren't told. Regardless of how much was hidden from him, he endured the refining fire anyway.

Do you fear the fire? Do you worry about the heat that circumstances generate? Perhaps, as with Job, the heat of God seems unexplainable. It may be the difficulty of adjusting to a new job or a new home. It could be having to survive ill treatment at work or even within your own family. It could be illness or financial loss. Hard as it is to understand, God can use these trials to refine you and purify you and bring out His image in your character.

Being proven to be gold seems to be an incentive for Job here, something to fix his eyes upon and that helps pull him through his troubles. It's a powerful testimony to his character already that, amid all the pain and suffering, he was able to sense the reality of the purifying process. Also, however much he didn't understand, he knew that these trials would refine him.

In your own experience, how do trials refine and purify? What other ways could you be refined other than through suffering?

Jesus' Last Words

Jesus was in Jerusalem, about to die. According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' last teaching hour before Passover is spent telling His disciples parables, including the parables about the ten virgins and the sheep and the goats. These stories are related to the way we should live as we wait for Jesus to come. Thus their relevancy to today—with the signs of Jesus' soon return all around us—has never been more important.

In the parable of the ten virgins (*Matt. 25:1–12*), many commentators point out that the oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Ellen White agrees but also says that this oil is a symbol for character and that it is something no one can acquire for us.

Read the parable. In what ways does the meaning of the story change, depending on whether you see oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit or for the possession of character? What are the implications of this story for you if the oil represents the Holy Spirit, or a Christlike character?

Holy Spirit: _____

Character: _____

Read the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46. What criteria is used in separating the sheep and the goats?

Notice that the king separates the sheep and the goats based on their works, their character. Though Jesus is not teaching salvation by works here, we can see how important character development is in the plan of salvation and how those who are truly saved by Christ will reflect that salvation through their lives and characters.

It has been said that “character is what a person is in the dark.” What sort of person are you when no one is looking? What does that answer tell you about changes that need to be made?

“The Wise”

Yesterday we looked at the importance of character for those waiting for the Second Coming. Today we will look more specifically at the importance of character for those who are alive at the second coming of Jesus.

Read Daniel 12:1–10. What is the context? What time in earth’s history is being referred to? Most important, what can we tell from these texts about the character of God’s people alive at this time? What characteristics are given them, in contrast to the wicked? See also Rev. 22:11.

Daniel is told that just before Jesus comes, there will be a time of distress unequalled at any other time of history. In verse 3 and verse 10 we’re given a depiction of the righteous and the wicked during this time. Notice how the wicked “shall do wickedly” (*vs. 10, NKJV*) in contrast to the righteous, who in verse 2 shine brightly, perhaps because they have been “purified, made spotless and refined” (*vs. 10, NIV*) during this “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (*vs. 1, NKJV*). In contrast, too, the wicked do not understand, but the righteous are “wise” and do understand.

Understand what? Math, science, higher criticism? Proverbs says that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (*Prov. 1:7, NKJV*). Perhaps, in this context, the “wise” are wise because they have an understanding of these final events, the time of trouble, as it unfolds. They are not taken by surprise; from their study of the Word, they know it’s coming. And most important, they know enough to allow this time of trouble to purify and refine them; the wicked, on the other hand, are just made more obstinate in their rebellion and thus continue in their wickedness.

The crucial point is that we here are given a depiction of a people who have been through a refining and purifying process.

Though we’ve looked at these texts in the context of the very last days, what principles do we see here that can help us now better understand what the purifying and refining process is all about, even for us today?

Character and Community

A song goes like this: “I am a rock, I am an island.” Have you ever felt like that? Wanting to stand alone? You may have even heard people say, “Well, my walk with God is a private affair. It’s not something I want to talk about.”

Read Ephesians 4:11–16. What’s the point Paul is making here? What role does he give here for community?

When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he describes the church as a body. Jesus is the head, and His people make up the rest. If you look at verse 13, you will notice the ultimate purpose of living in such a community—it is to experience “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (*NIV*). And for that we need each other!

It certainly is possible to be a Christian all alone. Indeed, like many people through the centuries who have been ridiculed or persecuted, standing alone is often unavoidable. It is a powerful witness to the power of God that men and women do not buckle under the pressures that surround them. However, while this is true, Paul is wanting to emphasize a critical truth: The fullness of Christ is ultimately experienced and revealed when we are working together in fellowship with each other.

In today’s text, what does Paul say must happen before the fullness of Christ may be revealed in our Christian community?

In what way is the witness of a community revealing the fullness of Christ different from an individual revealing the fullness of Christ? What are the implications of this in the context of the great controversy? *See Eph. 3:10.*

It’s easy to be nice when you are by yourself or with strangers, but it is much harder being nice to people you either know really well or don’t like. This means that when we still show these people grace and kindness, we provide an irresistible witness to the truth about God.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “God Promises Us a New Heart of Flesh,” p. 100, in *Sons and Daughters of God*; “To Meet the Bridegroom,” pp. 405–421, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “The Time of Trouble,” pp. 613–634, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 225.

“In the parable, the foolish virgins are represented as begging for oil, and failing to receive it at their request. This is symbolic of those who have not prepared themselves by developing a character to stand in a time of crisis. It is as if they should go to their neighbors and say, Give me your character, or I shall be lost. Those that were wise could not impart their oil to the flickering lamps of the foolish virgins. Character is not transferable. It is not to be bought or sold; it is to be acquired. The Lord has given to every individual an opportunity to obtain a righteous character through the hours of probation; but he has not provided a way by which one human agent may impart to another the character which he has developed by going through hard experiences, by learning lessons from the great Teacher, so that he can manifest patience under trial, and exercise faith so that he can remove mountains of impossibility.”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*; Jan. 16, 1896.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What does “character building” mean? How can you do this? How much of a visible priority is character building within your own life and your church community?
- 2** Thursday’s study talked about the important role of community in the life of a Christian. How well does your local church function as the body of Christ? How well do you represent the Lord as a community? As a class, talk about what you can do to improve.
- 3** As a class, talk about the question of why character building is important, even if we are saved by faith alone in Jesus. If His righteousness, and His perfect character, are what saves us, then what do we need to develop character for?
- 4** Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind from an early age, wrote, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”—*Leadership*, vol. 17, no. 4. Do you agree? Discuss the relationships between character, suffering, and the great controversy.

Midnight Taxi

by ILIYANA MARINKOVA

My husband and I live in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria. We are getting old; I am partially disabled, and my husband isn't too well either. Late one night we received a telephone call to come to my husband's village right away. There was a family problem. We got up and dressed and hurried to catch the last tram that would take us to the edge of Sofia.

It was near midnight when we climbed off the tram and started to walk the two and a half miles (four kilometers) to the village. You can imagine what it looked like—these two old people hobbling along an empty road in the middle of the night.

We got about halfway to the village and felt that we just could not go any farther. We knew it was not safe to stay along the road, but we were tired. We knelt down and asked God to help us get to the village. Then we got up and started walking again. We heard car brakes behind us, and a car rolled to a stop beside us. The driver rolled down his window and asked, "Are you the people who called me to take you to Mirovyane?"

We were surprised, for we had no telephone with us to call anyone, but this man knew that we were going to Mirovyane.

"Never mind," he said in a gentle voice. "If you wish, get in and I will take you to your destination."

We climbed into this man's car and rode to the village. The man said nothing as he drove the short distance to the village. He stopped at a bus stop in the village quite near our destination. We thanked the man and climbed out, relieved that we did not have to walk those last two kilometers. We started down the street toward our relatives'. Behind us we heard the car tires squeal as the driver turned around. We turned to wave our thanks, but the street was empty. We saw no taillights, no dust in the road to indicate that a car had been there.

"He's gone," I told my husband. "He just disappeared." I walked back to where the man had let us off, but there was no sign of this man or his car.

We don't know whether this man was an angel or a human sent by God to rescue two tired old people from an isolated road on a dark night.

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