

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(10) Helping the Tempted (pages 161-169)

Summary:

Grace is a core feature of God's nature, and is exercised toward undeserving human beings. The more we treat others the way God treats us, the more we can help the tempted and the erring.

Thoughts:

God does not treat us as we deserve. Every human being is the object of His loving interest. Christ's example in these things is the standard of our service for the tempted and the erring. We are to manifest the same tenderness toward others that He has manifested toward us. (161-162)

In dealing with the erring, many feel it is important to represent the justice of God. But this fails on two counts. 1) It fails to represent his tenderness and great love. 2) People make positive changes when they are approached with love and grace, they tend to rebel when approached with severity and criticism. The only class of people that Christ treated with severity and criticism was the class that stood apart in their self-esteem and looked down on others (Pharisees). (163-164)

Methodism at the time had a very similar focus on the love of God. The Methodist idea of perfection was not absolute, but meant living a life of love in response to God's love. But while Ellen White can use Methodist language, she never talks about the "second blessing" of perfection that Wesley spoke about.

Why would God treat Pharisees differently? Don't they need grace and nurture as much as anyone else? We should remember that even when rebuking people Jesus had "tears in His voice."

Jesus treated everyone with respect, even those who had fallen the lowest in depravity, enmity and impurity. He never acted shocked or offended. He met each person with tenderness and encouragement. It is humiliating to have our mistakes pointed out, so we should not make the experience more bitter by needless censure. Reproach repels, gentleness attracts. We destroy those we seek to help when we show the least amount of disrespect, indifference or distrust. (165-168)

How to reconcile the above paragraph with the Testimonies, which often pointed out sins in a way that could be experienced as humiliating? It is interesting that Methodists had spiritual clubs in which it was a major focus to point out flaws in the character of others in order to encourage self-improvement. Coming out of that background, Ellen White would not have seen a contradiction between the graceful words of this chapter and the need at times to point out flaws in others. But such rebuke must occur in the context of loving relationship.

Ellen White's writings are much more grace oriented after 1888. But that doesn't mean she changed her view, rather her emphasis shifted from a more eschatological (end-time) approach (the bulk of Great Controversy was written in the pre-1888 period) to a more soteriological (salvation). Interestingly, the NT uses eschatological language to talk about salvation.

A major reason people struggle with Ellen White is that people are prone to taking the

“wrong medicine.” Pharisees tend to gravitate toward the statements that point out flaws and become more discouraged. Grace-oriented people gravitate to the grace-filled statements and don’t always allow themselves to be confronted by obedience.

Quotable Quotes:

“Grace is an attribute of God exercised toward undeserving human beings. We did not seek for it, but it was sent in search of us. God rejoices to bestow His grace upon us, not because we are worthy, but because we are so utterly unworthy. Our only claim to His mercy is our great need.” (161)

“By the mystery and glory of the cross we are to discern His estimate of the value of the soul. When we do this, we shall feel that human beings, however degraded, have cost too much to be treated with coldness or contempt.” (162-163)

“The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin. Many think that they are representing the justice of God while they wholly fail of representing His tenderness and His great love.” (163)

“The love of Christ, manifested in word and act, will win its way to the soul, when the reiteration of precept or argument would accomplish nothing.” (163-164)

“Christ honored man with His confidence and thus placed him on his honor. Even those who had fallen the lowest He treated with respect. It was a continual pain to Christ to be brought into contact with enmity, depravity, and impurity; but never did He utter one expression to show that His sensibilities were shocked or His refined tastes offended. Whatever the evil habits, the strong prejudices, or the overbearing passions of human beings, He met them all with pitying tenderness. As we partake of His Spirit, we shall regard all men as brethren, with similar temptations and trials, often falling and struggling to rise again, battling with discouragements and difficulties, craving sympathy and help. Then we shall meet them in such a way as not to discourage or repel them, but to awaken hope in their hearts.” (165)

“Many a poor soul is misunderstood, unappreciated, full of distress and agony. . . . Oh, let no word be spoken to cause deeper pain!” (168)

Tweets of Healing:

Our only claim to God’s mercy is our great need. (161)

At the cross we discern the true value of the soul. (162-163)

The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin. (163)

The love of Christ wins its way into the soul, when the recital of arguments would accomplish nothing. (163-164)

Christ honored man with His confidence and thus placed him on his honor. (165)

Even those who had fallen the lowest Jesus treated with respect. (165)

As we partake of His Spirit, we shall regard all others as brothers and sisters. (165)

Reproach repels, gentleness attracts. (166)

Many are misunderstood, unappreciated, and full of distress and agony. Let no word be spoken to cause deeper pain! (168)