

Seeing *the* Goldsmith's Face



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

“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 been originally. This is where our verse today fits in. It reveals God’s plan that those who submit their lives to the Holy Spirit may be “conformed to the image 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 the quote cited above? (See also *Job 1*, *Matt. 5:16*, *1 Cor. 4:9*, and *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 can bring honor to Christ through our lives.

Imagine being on the field of a huge stadium. Sitting on 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 were 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 ones 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 significant.

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 of 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 are 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 the answer tell you about changes that you need to make?

“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 verses about the character of God’s people during these times? 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 Daniel 12:3, 10, we’re given a depiction of the righteous and the wicked during this time. Notice how the wicked “shall do wickedly” (*Dan. 12:10, NKJV*) in contrast to the righteous, who in verse 3 shine brightly, perhaps because they have been “purified, made spotless and refined” (*Dan. 12:10, NIV*) during this “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (*Dan. 12:1, 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 here we 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 to understand better what the purifying and refining process is all about, even 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 even have 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 Ephesians 4:13, 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, as for many people throughout 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 emphasizes a critical truth: ultimately, we experience and reveal the fullness of Christ 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 that is revealing the fullness of Christ different from the witness of an individual that is revealing the fullness of Christ? What are the implications for 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 to be 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 Thought: 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*, January 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 though we are saved by faith alone in Jesus. Since His righteousness and His perfect character are what save us, then why do we need to develop character?
- 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.

Part 4: Plotting With Spirits

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Months passed before Mother and Junior learned why Father had abandoned them for two months and lived in the Candomblé temple in Manaus, Brazil. It was because Junior wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

After seeing a man baptized at Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church, Junior told Mother that he also wanted to be baptized. Mother told Father, and Father, at the temple, was ordered by evil spirits to stop the plan.

At home, Father tried to convince Junior to reconsider, but the boy stood firm. The evil spirits stepped up their pressure, telling Father that he would be destroyed if he did not stop Junior. Father didn't understand how Junior's baptism could destroy him, but he agreed to a plan by the spirits to move out of the house. The spirits said Mother would lose both her husband and her job on the same day, and she would stop taking Junior to church. Father didn't want to leave home, and he worried about the plan all day. But when Mother arrived home late from a church event that night, he angrily decided to leave.

At first, the plan unfolded as predicted. The next day, Father left the house, and Mother lost her job. But the rest of the plan fell through. The spirits had hoped that Mother would run out of money and stop taking Junior to church. But when Mother couldn't afford to buy gasoline, church members offered rides in their cars. After two months, the spirits declared that they would create a new plan to prevent Junior from being baptized. They told Father to return home.

Meanwhile, Junior had started Bible studies in preparation for baptism. He joined Pathfinders, participated in the church's music program, and helped operate the church's sound system. Although the evil spirits had promised to stop Junior from being baptized, the boy's desire only grew. To Father's chagrin, Mother also started talking about getting baptized.

Pastor Ricardo set the date for Junior's baptism on October 29, a year after the boy had first heard about the Adventist Church at his friend Clifferson's house. Mother longed to be baptized at the same time. When she told Pastor Ricardo, he gazed at her seriously. "You cannot be baptized because you're not legally married," he said. The words hit Mother like a punch. Her common-law marriage was blocking her desire to be baptized with Junior. Pastor Ricardo saw her disappointment. "Don't worry," he said. "Ask Eduardo to marry you."

Tears flowed down Mother's cheeks as she left church. She doubted Father would agree, but she sought him out. "I have a question. No matter how you answer, our relationship won't change. Will you marry me?"

Father pursed his lips into a pouty, puppy-dog expression. Then his face grew serious. "No," he said. "I'll never marry you."

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *2 Corinthians 3:18*

Study Focus: *Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10, Job 23:1–10, Matt. 25:1–12, Dan. 12:1–10, Eph. 4:11–16.*

Part I: Overview

This week’s lesson focuses on the crucible of purification. Purification requires a standard. In our case, the standard is the image of God in us and the image of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect reflection of the image of God (*Heb. 1:3*). Purification also requires an agent of purification, which the Bible often presents as fire (*1 Pet. 1:7, Rev. 3:18*). The result of purification is seen in our character, represented by the oil in the lamps of the ten virgins in the parable of Jesus (*Matt. 25:1–13*). The book of Daniel describes the character of those purified as “wise” in the things of God (*Dan. 1:19, 20; Dan. 2:47, 48; Dan. 3:26–30*).

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights four major themes.

1. Suffering plays an essential role in the process of character formation and purification.
2. We will see that character formation is the restoration of the image of God in humans, as they were created by God in the beginning, as well as the shaping of our characters according to the image of Christ.
3. This formation of character entails the theme of the cosmic conflict. It is in this conflict between good and evil, God and Satan, that we experience the crucible of maturity.
4. Purification and maturity are never achieved by individuals in isolation; rather, purification and maturity are achieved by individuals in communities.

Part II: Commentary

Ellen G. White on Suffering Trials

The subject of the relation between crucibles and purification is very important. Ellen G. White’s comments on this subject are revealing and relevant. In one of her major books, she quotes John Huss’s letter to a friend in which Huss relates the suffering of Jesus to our suffering. In that same letter, Huss also relates suffering to purification: “Jesus Christ suffered for His well-beloved; and therefore ought we to be astonished that He has left us His example, in order that we may ourselves endure with patience all things for our own salvation? He is God, and we are His crea-

tures; He is the Lord, and we are His servants; He is Master of the world, and we are contemptible mortals—yet He suffered! Why, then, should we not suffer also, particularly when suffering is for us a purification? Therefore, beloved, if my death ought to contribute to His glory, pray that it may come quickly, and that He may enable me to support all my calamities with constancy.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 105.

Elsewhere, Ellen G. White writes in a similar vein herself: “Complain not bitterly of the trial which comes upon you, but let your eyes be directed to Christ, who has clothed his divinity with humanity, in order that we may understand how great is his interest in us since he has identified himself with suffering humanity. He tasted the cup of human sorrow, he was afflicted in all our afflictions, he was made perfect through suffering, tempted in all points like as humanity is tempted, in order that he might succor those who are in temptation. He says, ‘I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.’ He will make a man precious by abiding with him, by giving unto him the Holy Spirit. He says, ‘If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?’ ”—*The Signs of the Times*, March 5, 1896.

To a church member controlled by appetite, she writes: “Now he should so estimate the eternal reward, the treasure in the heavens, the immortal inheritance, the crown of glory that is unfading, that he can cheerfully sacrifice the gratification of depraved appetite, let the consequence or suffering be ever so great, in order to accomplish the work of purification of the flesh and of the spirit.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 99.

To “Brother G,” Ellen G. White writes a letter explaining the relation between suffering and purification in the Advent people preparing for the second coming of Jesus: “The purification of the people of God cannot be accomplished without their suffering. God permits the fires of affliction to consume the dross, to separate the worthless from the valuable, that the pure metal may shine forth. He passes us from one fire to another, testing our true worth. If we cannot bear these trials, what will we do in the time of trouble? If prosperity or adversity discover falseness, pride, or selfishness in our hearts, what shall we do when God tries every man’s work as by fire, and lays bare the secrets of all hearts? True grace is willing to be tried; if we are loath to be searched by the Lord, our condition is serious indeed. God is the refiner and purifier of souls; in the heat of the furnace the dross is separated forever from the true silver and gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test. He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal that it may reflect the radiance of His divine love.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 85, 86.

She continues this topic in the same profound manner: “God brings His people near Him by close, testing trials, by showing them their own weakness and inability, and by teaching them to lean upon Him as their only

help and safeguard. Then His object is accomplished. They are prepared to be used in every emergency, to fill important positions of trust, and to accomplish the grand purposes for which their powers were given them. God takes men upon trial; He proves them on the right hand and on the left, and thus they are educated, trained, disciplined. Jesus, our Redeemer, man's representative and head, endured this testing process. He suffered more than we can be called upon to suffer. He bore our infirmities and was in all points tempted as we are. He did not suffer thus on His own account, but because of our sins; and now, relying on the merits of our Overcomer, we may become victors in His name.

“God’s work of refining and purifying must go on until His servants are so humbled, so dead to self, that, when called into active service, their eye will be single to His glory. He will then accept their efforts; they will not move rashly, from impulse; they will not rush on and imperil the Lord’s cause, being slaves to temptations and passions and followers of their own carnal minds set on fire by Satan. Oh, how fearfully is the cause of God marred by man’s perverse will and unbridled temper! How much suffering he brings upon himself by following his own headstrong passions! God brings men over the ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility and a transformation of character bring them into harmony with Christ and the spirit of heaven, and they are victors over themselves.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 86.

Part III: Life Application

1. **We have learned that we are purified from our sins by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. But we also have learned that we are purified by suffering. Is there a contradiction between these two ideas? Not at all. We are justified by God’s grace, and we receive His forgiveness of sins by faith; thus, we are set apart for God and live for God. Justification and forgiveness are both declarations and deep spiritual experiences. But then we continue in the experience of grace in the context of the great controversy, in which we are tried and in which we prove ourselves as faithful and loving to our Lord. In this experience, we discover that many times we may fail. We also discover hidden characteristics that must be abandoned. We purge them by God’s grace. Purification is a real experience that happens to real persons in a real history. How does this understanding help you in your experience of purification? In what ways have you personally noticed that the Holy Spirit is purifying your character?**

- 2. How do you experience continually contemplating the image of Christ in your life? How have you experienced a transformation of your character and personality according to His image?**

- 3. In what ways have you experienced growing more mature in your faith as an individual? How could you describe this growth?**

- 4. How has your church congregation matured spiritually? In what ways have other people, within and without your faith community, noticed the same growth? Describe what you and other members of your community of faith have observed.**

Notes


