

The Conquering of the Character

April – 65



Upon High Places

**INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY
SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
REFORM MOVEMENT**

Youth Department of the General Conference

My dear youth:

I invite you to reflect on the text of Proverbs 23:26, "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways." Here the Lord asks us to give Him our heart. What will these words mean? Let's see. Everest is the highest place on earth located at 29,029 feet above sea level, between the border of Nepal and Tibet. Many climbers and locals have died trying to conquer the highest peak in the world, remaining forever buried in its snow and cliffs, however, others have successfully topped its summit.

The greatest conquest of all

The great achievements of humanity, such as: conquering Everest, traveling through space, building the Egyptian pyramids, making inventions such as the automobile, the airplane, and others, are not the most important achievements of the human being as one might expect. Human beings come into this world with a challenge to face, that is, a conquest to achieve; it is the **conquering of our character**.

Sometimes you hear people say, justifying their mistakes and lack of character: "What am I going to do? I am like that, that is my character." We can actually do a lot with God's help to shape our character after the character of Christ. Character is not something that is given to us when we are born, but is built according to the education we receive at home, the impressions of the environment, the prevailing culture, the decisions we make in life, etc. Character, then, is what differentiates us from others, while temperament is received at birth.

How many people achieve great success in the professional or artistic area, they do things that the world applauds and praises with enthusiasm, and yet they have not managed to conquer their character; they show traits that are deplorable, such as: bad humor, anger, discontent, hatred, lies, and others. **The conquest of character has to do with becoming more like Christ** every day, and this is achieved through the decisions we make, with the thoughts and beliefs that we decide to harbor, with the emotions and feelings that we experience every day, with our actions. The philosopher Plato said: "The conquest of oneself is the greatest of victories," and he was right.

The sad reality is that our hearts are corrupted by sin, attached to the useless things of this world, a prisoner of sinful passions, and we cannot conquer our character with our own strength; we need help. This is our real condition. That is why we have said that the greatest conquest of every human being is to achieve a genuine change of heart. That is why Christ came into this world. His life and work are the best example that He has left us to imitate, and God asks us to conform our life to that of our Divine Model, the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus invites us to imitate Him, to learn from Him: "**Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**" Matthew 11:29. According to these words our goal should be to have the character of Christ. If we look at humans we will have many reasons to be proud, because everyone is full of flaws and we will always find someone who has more than us, but the model to imitate is Christ, the One who had no defect nor was deceit found in His mouth.

Transformed beings

But how can we achieve, dear youth, this conquest that is thousands of times more difficult than climbing Everest? If God did not have the necessary elements to help us carry out this work He would not ask us, and if He asks us, it is through His power that we can manage to climb and dominate our selfish heart. This message that we present is not intended to be a utopia or something that serves to gratify the ears of the listeners, in fact we rely on the Word of God itself to believe that it will be so. It is the word of our Creator that is compromised and if He has said it, it will be possible with His help because God does not lie.

To show us that it is possible to submit our bad character and reflect the character of Christ, we will base ourselves on a biblical story, that of the apostle John. This man, who is normally known as: the *disciple of love*, the author of the marvelous teachings that appear in the Gospel, in his epistles, and in Revelation, the apostle of tenderness and compassion. But few are those who reflect on the life of John before the conquering of his character.

John was so **impulsive** and **explosive** that Jesus called him a *son of thunder* (Matthew 3:7). Thunder is a very graphic and clear example to describe Juan's explosive and indomitable character. In reality, most people, when we are oppressed or receive some injustice or mistreatment, we tend to explode, lose control... How many of us could be called a *son of thunder*?

John was also **selfish**, he wanted the first place in the group of twelve apostles; he longed for pre-eminence, to stand out, direct, control, his self was highly developed. Let us remember that John's mother asked Christ for her two sons to occupy the most important positions, both on either side of the Savior, one on the right and the other on the left, in the new kingdom that they believed the Master was to establish. Isn't selfishness one of the plagues that most destroys human beings, our marriages, our children, families, societies, businesses, and even the church?

John was **violent**, as evidenced by the fact that he once suggested to the Savior to burn some Samaritans who did not accept to receive Christ: **“And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’”** Luke 9:54. How terrible! How far can we human beings go in our mental blindness? In reality, don't we all allow a certain amount of aggressiveness and violence to surface when we find ourselves in situations that overwhelm us? We would be amazed at what human beings are capable of if our character is not controlled by the Spirit of God.

Juan was also **critical** and susceptible to criticism from others, **exclusivist** and possessed an air of grandeur. How many things did Juan have to change! Well, despite all that he changed. Surely no one would have given anything for him. This can also happen to us and despite all this, John changed, he **conquered his character**, he reflected Christ in his life in a faithful, extraordinary way and from *Boanerges* he came to be called *the disciple of love*. What happened to John? Dear youth, I want to share with you in a synthetic way what the Bible teaches about the transformation of the heart.

A work of God in the human soul

First of all, **John associated with Christ**; he learned to follow him. He left everything to be by his side and to know Him. He was passionate about the Gospel; his life was impregnated with the influence of the Savior.

Second, **John was ready to detect and accept his own mistakes**. It is easier to see the defect of others than your own, but those who are ready to admit their own shortcomings are more likely to change.

Third, **John had a strong desire to improve his character**. Those who make every effort to change their character, with God's help, are on the road to success.

Fourth, **John took advantage of every lesson that Christ imparted**: “**Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.**” Psalm 119:11.

Fifth, John worked his will in the right direction. “God has given us the power of choice; it is ours to exercise. We cannot change our hearts... But we can choose to serve God, we can give Him our will; then He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus our whole nature will be brought under the control of Christ.

“Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in the life. By yielding up the will to Christ, we ally ourselves with divine power. We receive strength from above to hold us steadfast.” *Temperance*, pg. 112.

It is not that John no longer made any mistakes in his life, or that he was completely perfect, but that he managed to resemble Christ. Dear youth, as long as we live the process of sanctification will never end; there will always be new goals to reach. “**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.**” Philippians 3:12.

Conclusion

The Bible calls this process “**sanctification.**” It is a promise and it is at our disposal if we want it.

“**Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.**” Ezequiel 11:19-20.

Dear youth, I invite you to undertake, if you have not already done so, the work of your life: conquering your heart, building a character like that of Christ, is what will make you the happiest, I guarantee it. God bless you and grant you this.

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For personal reflection and group study:

1. What is the greatest achievement of the human being?
2. Why do human means fail to achieve this goal?
3. How can we achieve this victory?
4. What did John the disciple of love do to achieve it?