

Lesson #5 – Horizontal Atonement: The Cross and the Church – 22-28 July 2023

Christ bore down every “middle wall of partition,” and left for every man a straight, clear path to the place He Himself occupies upon the throne of the Infinite. Paul writes, “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (Ephesians 2:13-14). Christ is the life, as well as the way, therefore He is the living way. We cannot get the benefit of Christ as the way, unless we know Him as the life. He is the Word of life, the light of men. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). In other words, “the life was manifested, and we have seen it” (1 John 1:2). There is no real life but the life of Christ – Christ Himself. His life – He Himself – is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He has for ever identified Himself with humanity, that man may for ever be made one with Divinity. He has taken all mankind upon Himself, and is the bearer of all the burdens of humanity. His life given freely to every soul, is the way from sin to righteousness. It is the victory. Altogether too much is Christ kept at a distance. He is near, but men persist in building up barriers which God has broken down. The middle wall of partition between man and God has been broken down and taken away in the flesh of Christ, so that every man may be, if he will, what Christ is. “The Word was made flesh,” and He has “abolished in His flesh the enmity,” even the fleshly mind (John 1:14; Eph. 2:15). Now He was made our flesh. “There is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, another of birds” (1 Corinthians 15:39). It was the flesh of men that Christ took. It was the flesh of sinful men that He took, for He was “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:4). Yet He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). “He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). If therefore we will believe, and acknowledge, and hold to, the truth that Christ is our life, we shall find in reality that “as He is so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” 1 John 4:2. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9). How shall we confess the Lord Jesus? What shall we confess about Him? – Confess the truth, namely, that He is come in the flesh, even in our own sinful flesh. Reckon ourselves to be dead, and Him alone to be alive – the life. Then will all things be of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. Then it will no longer be we who profess to be living, and bunglingly trying to manage our own affairs, but Christ who actually lives, and who successfully does the will of God in us. The connection between us and Christ must be a vital one, if we would walk in the way. It must not be simply a joining of hands, that He may lead us in the way, as we follow, but a union of hearts and lives. We must be lost in Him. Remember that He is the way; hence if we would walk in the right way, we must live in Him. The identification between us and Him must be complete. What wondrously glorious possibilities there are for us in the fact that Christ is the way and the life – the living way. Let Christ do it, and all will be well.

Sunday: Brought Near in Christ – How are we brought near to the Father in Christ? No man cometh to the Father, to the place where God sits “in light that no man can approach unto,” except by Christ, who hath once “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). But in order we throughout eternity be able to stand before God and see His face, we must now draw near. And even now must we dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and full provision for this has been made, for “now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). Oh, what depth and breadth of comfort there is in those words of Jesus, “I am the way” (John 14:6)! We have all sinned, ‘all gone out of the way,’ and know not how to find God. We would gladly return to the Father’s house, but we know not the way. Jesus says, “I am the way.” His name is Immanuel, and He is with us all the days, even unto the end of the world, so that although we may wander far from God, behold, the way back to God is near to us. Though we wander out of the way, it goes with us, so that even while we may be fleeing from the way, the way is seeking us; for “the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Oh what a wonderful way, that itself seeks the wanderer!

Monday: Reconciliation: God's Gift From the Cross – What does it mean that we are reconciled by His death (Romans 5:10)? God is not our enemy, but we are or have been enemies to Him. He does not need to be reconciled to us, but we need reconciliation to Him. And He Himself, in the kindness of His heart, makes the reconciliation. We “are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). How so? Because it was sin that separated us from Him, and made us enemies; and “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). And being cleansed from sin, we must necessarily be reconciled to God.

Tuesday: Breaking Down the Dividing Wall – How does Christianity break down the dividing wall? Christianity annihilates caste. Jesus Christ came from the throne of God to the station of the lowliest man of earth, and in this He broke down every barrier between them. He was “meek and lowly in heart,” and so poor that He had not where to lay His head. He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was among men as one that serveth, and not as a lord or a “gentleman.” Yet in all this He retained His Divinity; for God was in Him, doing the works that He did (John 14:10). And therefore there is not a barrier that God has erected or that He upholds between the lowliest station upon earth and His own throne. But men have made barriers between themselves and those they deem their inferiors; and certain distinctions and classes are recognised by society; but we are told that “there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11). Christ bore down every “middle wall of partition,” and left for every man a straight, clear path to the place He Himself occupies upon the throne of the Infinite (Revelation 3:21). Not even cherubim and seraphim bar our way; they are no higher caste. The angel that brought the revelation of Christ to John, said, when John fell at his feet to worship him, “See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant; and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book; worship God” (Revelation 22:8-9). Any man who puts a barrier between himself and his fellow-men must at the same time barricade himself away from God; for it must be outside of that path which God has opened from earth to Himself; he will never get into that path until he takes his barrier down.

Wednesday: Jesus, Preacher of Peace – What peace does Paul say Jesus preaches? The same Paul preach in his salutation, “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:2). There is no true peace, but that of God. And “there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;” “The wicked are like the troubled sea, which can not rest” (Isaiah 57:21, 20). But all the world lieth in wickedness, yet the God of peace speaks peace to every soul. For Christ, the Prince of peace, “our peace,” hath made both God and man one, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, to make in Himself of two – God and man – one new man, so making peace – “making peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:14-15). “And, having made peace through the blood of His cross,” He “came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (verse 17): Peace to thee. All from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ!

Thursday: The Church, a Holy Temple – How are we the church and a holy temple of God? The living God dwells in a living house; and only a spiritual house befits Him who is Spirit. Accordingly we read that, coming unto the Lord, “a living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4-5). Of the house of God, “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:18-22). The household of God is the church of the living God (1 Timothy 3:15), but only because each individual member is the dwelling-place of God. To each person the word comes: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor. 3:16-17). When Jesus was asked how it was that He would manifest Himself to His disciples and not to the world, He replied: “If a man love Me, he may keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). The Word abiding in the heart sanctifies, so that the heart of each believer is the sanctuary of the living God.