

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – Crisis in Eden – 2-8 January 2016

Christ is the power and wisdom of God through whom His goodness was manifested to resolve the crisis in Eden. When man sinned, he lost enmity with Satan; Christ in His mercy for Adam's entire race, tells Satan: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). We focus on the goodness of God as a remedy to the Eden crisis.

We first warn: continuing the Eden crisis, Satan binds men into the Old covenant, "which gendereth to bondage" (Galatians 4:24) – its 'salvation is by faith but it is also by our good works.' This is subtly reflected in a statement that was made on the first page of this week's Lesson (Sabbath afternoon): "The story of the Fall remains a powerful reminder that our only safety as human beings exists not only in believing what God tells us but, more important, in obeying what He tells us, as well" – in other words, 'our obedience is "more important" than "believing" in Christ's obedience.' It is contrary to the Bible; it is not the gospel. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). The gospel of Christ is God's power unto salvation, but only "to every one that believeth" (verse 16); in it the righteousness of God is revealed. The righteousness of God is the perfect law of God, which is but the transcript of His own righteous will. This true gospel is God's remedy to sin; its work, therefore, must be to bring men into harmony with the law, – to cause the workings of the righteous law to be manifested in their lives. But this is wholly a work of faith, – the righteousness of God is revealed from "faith to faith," – faith in the beginning, and faith to the end, – "as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

This faith in Christ is true in all ages since the fall of man, and will be true until the saints of God have His name in their foreheads, and see Him as He is. It was from Habakkuk 2:4 that Paul quoted Romans 1:17. If the prophets had not revealed it, the first Christians could not have known of it; for they had only the Old Testament. To say that in the most ancient times men had but imperfect idea of faith in Christ is to say that there were no just men in those times. But Paul goes back to the very beginning and cites an instance of saving faith. He says: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Hebrews 11:4). He says of Noah, also, that it was by faith that he built the ark to the saving of his house; "by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (verse 7). We say, their faith was in Christ, because it was faith unto salvation, and besides the name of Jesus "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We turn to the goodness of God as a remedy for resolving the Eden crisis. "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). It is common for men to lay the blame of their sinful condition upon God; saying they are just as God made them. This kind of talk is increasing, and the logical result is the denial of any future punishment for sin. But that such a position is directly contrary to Bible teaching, it needs only this verse to disprove. God cannot deny Himself, and therefore He cannot work at cross-purposes. He cannot at one time deliberately set about to undo that which He has once done. That He has deliberately set about the salvation of men, the entire Bible attests. He manifested His hatred for sin, and His desire to rescue men from it, by giving His Son to die. This was the supreme manifestation of His goodness to lead men to repentance. All this effort to save men from sin is utterly inconsistent with the theory that God is any way responsible for sin.

Scripture plainly says, "as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). The terrible depth of sin into which man fell, and the first act of God's goodness to lead him from sin, are brought to view in Genesis 3:15, where it says: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed." The fact that the Lord had to put enmity between man and Satan shows that in the fall all of man's natural enmity to Satan had been obliterated.

God made man in His own image, both physically and spiritually; but when man yielded to the tempter, he deliberately rejected God, and became, body and soul, the servant of Satan. In that condition all his desires would have been for evil, and, like Satan and his angels, he

would have had not the shadow of a desire to do right. Of course a simple offer of salvation from sin could not have been any benefit to a man in such a condition. "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" (Proverbs 17:16). Of what use is to offer freedom from sin to men incapable of appreciating goodness? Therefore as the first act in the great plan of salvation, God put into the heart of man an enmity against Satan. It was purely an act of divine love. And since this enmity has been the inheritance of each of Adam's race, it follows that not a man has lived in earth, however wicked, who was not just to the extent that he ever had a thought of goodness, a subject of the grace of God.

It is this enmity implanted in the heart of men by God, upon which God's own Spirit works when it strives with men. It is this seed which the Spirit of God waters into fruitfulness, in those who will yield to its influence – leading all men toward repentance. God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). But all men will not be saved. Millions say to the Spirit of God: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" millions refuse to give it any recognition (Acts 24:25).

It is in this sense that God "is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those that believe" (1 Timothy 4:10). His love is bestowed alike upon all; to all He comes as a Saviour; but only those will be saved who will accept salvation in Christ. It is thus, that Christ is "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). Every man in the world has had a ray of divine light shining into his heart, – enough to have led him into the glorious liberty of the children of God; and by that light he was indebted to the grace of God in Christ.

"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:1-7). That the goodness of God is manifested to men in sin, in order to deliver them from sin, is shown plainly by the words to Titus: that salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5).

Now, "seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

What was the joy that was set before Christ? Although Christ was in the form of God, He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7). Christ by His Son-ship was equal with God, sharing His Father's glory (John 17:5). Before Him all the hosts of angels He had created (Colossians 1:16) bowed in adoration. But when Christ looked upon the world of men who were "dead in trespasses and sins," treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, all this glory seemed to fade away. He did not count it as a thing at all to be desired, so long as men were perishing before His eyes without help. And so He divested Himself of all His glory, and submitted to degradation and death, in order that He might win a still greater joy. And yes, even the joy of heaven could be increased, and that by removing the Joy of heaven to earth, that earth's misery might be turned to joy. Who can estimate the depth of love that could count the immeasurable bliss of heaven as nothing compared with the joy of bringing, through reproach, ignominy and death, fallen men to share it with Him? And this is the goodness of God toward men. Ought it not to lead them to repentance? Yea, verily; and such will be its effect upon everyone who will but steadfastly look at it. Oh that men would indeed look to "Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith," not once nor twice, but continually!