

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – The Restoration of All Things – 25 June-1 July 2016

Christ is by whom all things were created and are restored. If we should partake of this restoration, it behooves us to go back in the beginning. In the beginning God spoke to His Son, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God made man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:26-27). "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). When man forgot he was but dust, acted as though he was God, the image of God was shattered. To be restored, man must accept that he is but dust. These verses remind us we are but dust:

Genesis 2:9: "And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree." Genesis 1:24, 11: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind ... Let the earth bring forth grass." Isaiah 40:6: "All flesh is grass, and all the godliness thereof is as the flower of the field." Isaiah 40:15: "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing." Psalms 62:9-11: "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity. Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them. God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God." Psalms 90:3: "Thou turnest man to dust, and sayest, Return, ye children of men." Genesis 3:19: "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Job 42:6: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Psalms 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Psalms 103:13-14: "Like as a father pitieth his children so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." 1 Samuel 2:8: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory."

Out of the ground the Lord made man, the lower animals, and plants. All are from the dust, and all return to dust again. When man and animals return to dust, it is impossible to distinguish between them. Their dust is all alike. That which makes the difference between them in life is the working of God in them. "All flesh is grass." Even though man, contrary to the design of God, eat flesh of animals, the animal that he eats lives upon herbs, so that not only the first man, in the beginning, but every man, even to this day, comes from the ground.

It is not necessary to make comparisons between man and any other creature. Go back to the origin of man, and consider him just as he is, namely, dust. What power is there in the dust? Or what can dust do? Nothing! That is the power of man, for man is dust. The lesson that we are to learn is that we have no more power or wisdom in ourselves than the dust has that lies under our feet. We are dust that has been fashioned by the hand of God into a certain shape, and the breath of the Almighty has come into us, giving us understanding.

We have nothing to boast of over the dust that still lies in an unformed mass. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). A very insignificant part of the dust, too, is man. In the sight of God, as compared with His vast universe of matter, all the nations together "are counted as the small dust of the balance" (Isaiah 40:15). The dust that lies on the grocer's balance, which is so fine that it is not perceptible, and which makes no material difference in the amount of that which is being weighed, bears the same relative proportion to the earth that all nations together do to God's universe. "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" (Psalms 8:3-4).

As the last and crowning act of creation, "God created man in His own image." The process is thus briefly described: "And the Lord God made man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul." Man is therefore animated dust; but the life which animates him is the life of God. If men would but keep those two facts in mind, and not be ashamed to acknowledge them, they would be just what God wishes them to be in restoration; when man had been made, "God saw everything

that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.” The expression is the strongest that could be used. God Himself could find no fault in man, and that means perfection.

When man forgot that he was but dust, and began to act as though he were God, he fell, and the image of God was shattered. It is in this condition that we all find ourselves in this world, as sons of the fallen Adam. God’s purpose in Christ is “to restore all things,” and therefore “if any man be in Christ he is a new creature,” or, “there is a new creation.” The work of Christ, in whom all things were created in the beginning, is to make man over again, in the image of God, so that, as in the beginning, God can look at him and say, “very good.”

Only one thing stands in the way of this new creation, and that is man’s unwillingness to believe that he is nothing but dust. The thought is too humiliating. Dust has no power in itself, and if man were to confess himself to be but dust, that would be an admission that of himself he can do nothing; and that he does not like, for the natural man is continually boasting of his own powers, – ‘power of intellect’ or ‘power of body,’ forgetting that the higher degree he makes out for himself, the more of a lie he is (Psalms 62:9), since “every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psalms 39:5). That this refusal to acknowledge himself to be but dust stands in the way of the restoration of all things and of the new creation, appears from this, that since man deliberately chose his present condition, God leaves it to him to choose if he will accept the original condition again; and since man in the first instance was made in the image of God out of the dust, it follows that it is only as dust that he can become a new man again. Man has nothing more to do with his new creation than Adam had in the beginning; but every man can choose to be restored anew now. God alone can do the work.

Although man is for the most part quite indifferent as to his current condition, except as expressed by the commonly-declared desire to ‘better his own condition,’ God is not at all indifferent. His great desire is to see man as good as man was when the breath of the Almighty first gave him life and understanding, and no one knows so well as God that this change is impossible as long as man entertains the high notions of himself that he does; therefore God’s attention is directed towards causing man to see and realise that he is but dust, and that “life, and breath, and all things” come from Him alone. This is shown in the prayer of Moses, which here reads in part as follows: “Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou turnest man to dust, And sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night” (Psalms 90:1-4).

In Psalms 51:17 we read, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” That is, a heart, broken to pieces, and ground up to dust. It is true that man is only dust, no matter how high he exalts himself in his pride, so that the work of God in turning him to dust, or contrition, is to make him see his condition. When we are by the Spirit of God made conscious of our sinfulness, pride at once departs. God has many ways of bringing men to this condition, none of them pleasing to the natural man; but we are at present concerned only with the fact that God brings us low for our good.

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He does not despise a broken and a contrite heart, because out of it He can restore or create a new heart. It suits His purpose much better than anything else could. What He did in the beginning He can do again. All that anyone needs in order to be saved, is to recognise that he is but dust, and then implicitly to believe the story of creation. Wonderful things God can do with dust, as the Bible narratives plainly show.

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” To be in Christ plainly means to be of the same nature, and the first thing necessary to this is the acknowledgment, “I can of mine own self do nothing.” Christ, in whom we have redemption, “is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Such one in Christ is “created in righteousness and true holiness,” and day by day “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). The first man was made faultless. God looked him over, could not detect a single flaw, and pronounced him “very good.” Of Jesus Christ, in whom the new creation is effected, it is said, “in Him is no sin.” “There is no unrighteousness in Him.” This is why the first man was made perfect, because “in Him were all things created.” Therefore He is able to take us when we are but dust, and present us “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Who will humble himself, that he may be thus restored?