

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – The Wrath of Elihu – 26 Nov-2 Dec 2016

Christ would have us saved by the thoughts of God. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). Putting aside ‘the wrath of Elihu,’ we first focus on verses in Isaiah 55. The sixth and seventh verses contain an exhortation: “Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” In verse eight naturally follows the statement, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” The unrighteous man is to forsake his thoughts, because they are not the thoughts of God. We learn the wonderful fact that men must think the thoughts of God, in order to please Him.

What are the thoughts of God? It is evident that we must be able to determine this, to some extent, at least, or else we should not know whether or not to forsake the thoughts that we have, as not being His thoughts. Since the Bible is the word of God, it is plain that it must express His thought. In it we find what He thinks of different actions of men. But that which is most specifically the thought of God is His law, the Ten Commandments. It is His revealed will, comprehending in itself all that is drawn out in detail in the various books of the Bible.

The law of God is a law of love. It was given as love (Deuteronomy 33:2-3). The object of it is love (1 Timothy 1:5). Love is the fulfilling of it (Romans 13:10). The keeping of the commandments is the only complete manifestation of the love of God (1 John 5:3). In vain does one make a profession of love to God, while he does not keep His commandments (John 14:15; Luke 6:46). Thus, when Paul says that love “thinketh no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:5), he means that perfect obedience to the law of God consists in being free from evil thoughts. This must necessarily follow, because the law of God is the thoughts of God.

The statement that as the heavens are high above the earth so are God’s thoughts higher than our thoughts, may remind us that the heavens themselves may enable us to think God’s thoughts after Him. As the law of God is an expression of His thoughts as to morals, so the material universe is an expression of God’s thoughts in concrete form. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). In them we see the great thoughts God had when He planned the universe. They show His eternal power and Divinity, and thus are an aid in lifting our thoughts to the level of God’s, in the realm of morals. Surely it is impossible for a person to gaze upon the heavens thoughtfully, and with reverent recognition of their Creator, and at the same time to harbour evil thoughts.

But there is comfort as well as instruction in the fact that God’s thoughts are as much higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. It is in connection with the statement that God will “abundantly pardon” those who turn to Him. Now of His thoughts toward us we read: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11). His thoughts are of peace towards us; they are as much higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. This agrees with the statement in Psalm 36:5: “Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.” Also Psalm 108:4: “For Thy mercy is great above the heavens; and Thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.” And Psalm 103:11: “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.”

It would be well sometimes if doubting souls could think of their own *good* traits in contrast with those of God. Not to think how evil they are, but to rate at a fair value any good qualities they may possess, and then, holding to that valuation, think in how infinitely greater degree those same good qualities exist in God. For instance, take the quality of mercy; let a man think how he would receive one who, having injured him, comes to him with tears in his eyes, making a humble confession, and asking pardon. There are few who would even wait for the penitent one to finish his confession before assuring him of full pardon. His thoughts toward him would be all kindness; but God’s thoughts are as much higher than ours as heaven is higher than earth. God is as much more merciful than man as He is greater. So, whoever will institute such a comparison as this, will become ashamed of his own doubts.

Having in His word His thoughts, let us spread the word, for God's word will accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto He sends it (Isaiah 55:11). But this does not mean it will result in the conversion of the whole world. God's word has been as powerful in every age of the world as it is now; yet in no age of the world, not even when the Word was incarnate, have even a large minority of people acknowledged God. It is true, however, that even then it accomplished God's purpose. The word of God gathered out of the multitude a people for His name, and left the remainder without excuse. Of one thing we may be sure, that the word will prosper. Our outreach will not be in vain. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" (Ecclesiastes 11:6). It is certain that either this effort or that will prosper, and there is a possibility that both may yield abundant returns. And the few from every age, who have heeded the word of God, will at last form a great multitude whom no man can number (Revelation 7:9), who shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11), when the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads (Isaiah 35:10), and the whole earth shall praise God.

We turn to 'the wrath of Elihu.' Though misapplied to Job, Elihu in essence was against these questions: 'does the Lord require me to give this up? Can I not be saved if I do not?'

Have you not often heard such questions? Perhaps you yourself have had similar thoughts. There is among many people a feeling that God is exacting; that He requires too much of us, and that He ought to be satisfied with less. Indeed, if people would analyse their thoughts they would find such an idea that God is really benefiting Himself at their expense.

The words of Elihu to Job: "Thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's? For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin? I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee. Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against Him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto Him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him? or what receiveth He of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man" (Job 35:2-8).

Such thought, often unexpressed and half-unconscious, is nothing else than the very reverberation of the subtle temptation by which the serpent caused the fall of Eve. With a contemptuous sarcasm he asked the question, "Has God really said that ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1) and then he followed up this insinuations against God's justice by boldly saying that there was no harm in eating from the forbidden tree: "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5). Thus Satan made Eve believe that it was unjust for God to require her to abstain from eating the fruit of that tree; that she was really been abused; and that God was profiting by their abstinence.

Whenever we give up anything in obedience to God, we profit greatly at His expense. We talk about sacrifice, and what it costs us, foolishly forgetful of the fact that it is the Lord who has made the sacrifice, and the only real one that ever has been or can be made. Do you know what it costs Christ for you every time to give up an evil habit? – Nothing less than His life. You think it will cost you your life, or at least all that life is worth, say to give up perverted appetite, yet in doing so you will find life in such rich measure and so full of joy as you never knew before, but it cost Christ's heart's blood to enable you to do it. Ah, never again let the shadow of the thought enter your mind, that the Lord is causing you huge inconvenience to gratify Himself; He is, on the contrary, giving you happiness that the cost of His own life.

In this lie our strength, and the assurance that nothing is impossible to us. The Lord is asking us to *receive* something, instead of to give up. He asks us to receive His life, in which there is no shade of evil, and which is the very essence and fulness of light, and joy, and peace in order that we may be delivered from that which is to us darkness, sorrow, misery, and death. And the fact that our deliverance from the bondage of evil habits costs the Lord His life is the assurance of deliverance; for His life has proved victorious over all temptation. Then instead of murmuring about what we are required to give up, let us give thanks to God for His unspeakable gift. "What shall I render unto the lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Psalms 116:12-13).