

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – The Elect – 9-15 December 2017

Christ would have us know that God did not cast off His people. “I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1). In this week’s Lesson we study Romans 10 and 11. Let it be remembered that Last week’s Lesson in Romans 9 sets forth the condition of Israel according to the flesh – they who are called Israel. They are “accursed from Christ.” They “followed after the law of righteousness,” but did not attain to righteousness, because they sought it not by faith, but by works. The Gentiles, hence, gained precedence over them, because they sought righteousness in the right way, namely, by faith. Thus were fulfilled the words of Christ to the self-righteous Jews: “The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you;” and again, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:31, 43). But the Lord did not cast off His people because they stumbled at the Stone which He had placed for a foundation. He endured with much long-suffering even the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. Thus Paul continues his discourse in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Romans.

Sunday: Christ and the Law – The Jews had “the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law;” but they had not the truth itself. The law of God, as written on the tables of stone, or in a book, is as perfect as it could possibly be. But there was just the same difference between that and the real law that there is between a photograph of a man and the man himself. It was but a shadow. There was no life in the written characters, and they could not do anything. They were simply the statement of that which exists only in the life of God. The Jews very well knew that the words on the stone or in the book could not do anything; and since they were ignorant of the righteousness of which those words were but the description, they went about to establish a righteousness of their own. This they would never have done if they had not been ignorant of God’s righteousness.

Of that the psalmist says, “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains” (Psalms 26:6). They were trying to produce from themselves the essential attribute of God. Such an effort, no matter how great the zeal, could end only in miserable failure. Saul of Tarsus was “more exceedingly zealous of the traditions” of the fathers than any others of his class, yet when he came to a right understanding, those things that were gain to him he was obliged to count but loss. That is, the more he did to establish his own righteousness, the worse off he became. If the Jews had not been ignorant of God’s righteousness, they would not have attempted to establish a righteousness of their own. They tried to make God’s righteousness submit to them, whereas they should have submitted to it. God’s righteousness is active. It is His own life. Just as the air will rush into any place where there is an opening, so the righteous life of God will fill every heart that is open to receive it. When men try to handle the law of God, they invariably pervert it, and fit it to their own ideas; the only way to have its perfection appear is to submit to it, allowing it to rule. Then it will work itself out in life. “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5). Charity is love, and “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). The end of the law is its perfect fulfilment. That is self-evident. It makes no difference in what sense the word “end” is taken. Suppose it be used in the common sense of ‘object.’ It is very plain that the things which it requires shall be done. Or use the word “end” in the ordinary sense of the farthest extent, and we have the same thing. You arrive at the end of a law only when you reach the utmost limit of its requirement. We have seen that the end or object of the law is the righteousness which it requires. So it is said that Christ is the end of the law “for righteousness.” The law of God is the righteousness of God (Isaiah 51:6-7). But this righteousness is the real life of God himself, and the words of the law are only the shadow of it. That life is found only in Christ, for he alone declares the righteousness of God (Romans 3:24, 25). His life is the law of God, since God was in Him. That which the Jews had only in form, is found in fact only in Christ. In Him the end of the law is found. Does any one say that “the end of the law” means its abolition? Very well; when they find the abolition of Christ, they will have found the abolition of the law, and not before. Only a study of the life of Christ will reveal the righteousness which the law of God requires.

We may ask the question: To whom is Christ the end of the law for righteousness? “To every one that believeth.” Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17). The perfect righteousness of the law is found only in Him. It is in Him in absolute perfection. Since Christ dwells in the heart of the believer, so in Him only is the end of the law attained. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29). And “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.”

Monday: The Elect of Grace – The keynote of the Gospel call is “whosoever.” “God so loved the world, that he gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation

22:17). "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." No distinction is made; "for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek." Read again the second and third chapters of Romans, and the fourth also. Indeed, the whole book of Romans gives a deathblow to that wicked idea that God is partial, and that He favours some people more than others. The idea that God has special blessings for one nation of earth that He has not for others, and no matter whether that one nation be called Jews, is a direct denial of the gospel of the grace of God. The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth verses show the steps necessary for salvation. First, men must call upon the Lord. But in order to call upon Him, they must believe in Him. But they cannot hear without someone being sent. But preachers have been sent, yet all have not believed and obeyed, although they have all heard. What have they all heard? – They have all heard the word of God. In proof of this, the apostle says that faith comes by hearing the word of God, and adds: "Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." All in the world have heard, and there is no excuse for unbelief on the part of any.

Tuesday: The Natural Branch – The Jews did not keep the faith. "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14). This they did not do, and so they became "without Christ," "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:12). In Romans 11:17 the apostle asks, What "if some of the branches be broken off?" etc, not meaning, however, to imply that some were not broken off, as we learn from what follows. For he says, "Because of unbelief they were broken off" (verse 20), and again, "God hath concluded them all in unbelief" (verse 32), thus showing that all were broken off. So we find the people who were "beloved for the fathers' sakes" (verse 28) and who had at one time in their history been "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26) reduced by their unbelief to the level of those who had never known God. All the branches of the olive tree Israel were broken off through unbelief. To supply their places God took branches from the wild olive tree the Gentiles and grafted them on. This grafting was "contrary to nature" (verse 24), since it was wholly a work of grace. If it had been according to nature, then the branches would have borne natural fruit, and there would be no gain from the grafting, since the natural fruit was bad (Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 2:1, 2). But a miracle was wrought by grace, and the branches that were grafted in partook of the nature of the root. The fruit of the grafted-in branches is no more natural, but that of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

We must remember that God did not cast off His people. They fell away through unbelief. "They also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again" (verse 23). The Jew has as good a chance as the Gentile. "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). Christ came "that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross," and "through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2:16, 18). Let us not forget that in thus grafting in the Gentiles to take the place of rebellious Israel, there has been no change in God's plan. It was all included in the original promise to Abraham. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:7-8). In the beginning God made Adam, the father of the human race. Adam was the son of God (Luke 3:38); all his descendants are by right God's people. He did not cast them off because they sinned. His love embraced the world (John 3:16), and it did not contract in the days of Jacob. The only advantage of Israel was that they had the privilege of carrying the glorious gospel to the Gentiles, for whom it was always designed as much as for them.

Wednesday: All Israel Shall Be Saved – Note carefully verses 25-27. When the fullness of the Gentiles shall have been brought in, "all Israel shall be saved." Indeed, it is only by the bringing in of the Gentiles that all Israel will be saved. And this will be a fulfillment of that which is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Only through Christ can Israel be saved and gathered; and all who are Christ's are Israel; for "if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

Thursday: The Salvation of Sinners – There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, who shall turn away ungodliness from Israel. Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The high priest Caiaphas spoke by the Spirit "that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:51, 52). Peter, speaking in the temple at Jerusalem, said: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" Acts 3:25, 26). The blessing of Abraham is the forgiveness of sins through Christ.