

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – God Created ... – 29 June-5 July 2019

Christ would have us know that the source of all creation is God and that Christ is the means of all that creation. The Bible is clear that it is “God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). Who created all things? God. How? “by Jesus Christ.” God created by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). The source of creation is the Father; the means of creation is His Son. We echo Paul’s declaration: “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6). For this week’s Lesson, we comment on the memory text, and then comment in general terms on the creation of man and the key to new creation.

Lest they forget, the memory text reminds the rich that they and the poor share the same Maker: “He that oppressteth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor” (Proverbs 14:31). No one can deny that the poor are grossly abused; but very few of the poor are willing to accept Christ’s method of deliverance. No one can condemn the oppression of the poor by the rich any more strongly than it is done in the Bible, for Christ is the poor man’s friend. The Lord cares for the poor and the afflicted. He has identified Himself so closely with them that whosoever gives to the poor is considered as lending to the Lord. Christ was on this earth as a poor man, so that “he that oppressteth the poor reproacheth his Maker.” “The Lord heareth the poor” (Psalms 69:33). “The needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever” (Psalms 9:18). “The Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor” (Psalms 140:12). “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (Psalms 12:5). “Lord, who is like unto Thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?” (Psalms 35:10). With our Maker so interested in their case, what a pity it is that the poor are so ill-advised as to seek to right their own wrongs!

The Lord says: “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you” (James 5:1-6). This is a terrible indictment against the oppressors of the poor, and those who have defrauded them of their rightful wages. It is also a promise of sure judgment against them. The Lord hears the cry of the poor, and He does not forget. Every act of oppression He considers as directed against Himself. But when the poor take matters into their own hands, meeting monopoly with monopoly, they put themselves in the same class with their oppressors, and deprive themselves of the deliverance of the Lord in their behalf.

To the rich oppressors God says, “Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you.” The injunction, “I say unto you, That ye resist not evil,” means just that, and nothing else; and it is not out of date. It is just as applicable today as it was hundred years ago. The world has not changed in its character; the greed of men is the same now as then; and God and His Son are the same. Those who heed that injunction, heaven calls “the just.” The just do not resist when they are unjustly condemned and defrauded, and even killed.

‘But how then can there ever be any remedy for these wrongs, if the poor suffer even to death?’ Christ says to the poor, He is not ashamed to call them brethren, and He says, “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:7-8). The coming of the Lord is the time when all oppression shall cease.

Turning to creation of man and the need for a recreation, we first note that, 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" (Genesis 2:7). 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; for when man had been made, "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 2:31). 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, power of body, and so on, forgetting that the higher degree he makes out for himself, the more of a lie he is (Psalms 62:61), since "every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalms 39:5). That this refusal of man to acknowledge himself to be but dust stands in the way 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.

Although man is for the most part quite indifferent as to his deplorable condition, except as expressed by the commonly-declared desire to 'better his own condition,' God is not indifferent. His great desire is to see man as good as man was when the breath of the Lord 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. Thus Moses prayed: "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" (Psalms 90:1-4). Similarly we read in Psalms 51:17, "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 departs. God has many ways of bringing men to this condition, none of them pleasing to the carnal nature; but we are at present concerned only with the fact that God brings us low for our good. In ancient times, when men were more picturesque in their representation of things, they put dust on their heads, or sat in the dust, as an indication of their low state. That was a sign of repentance, for it showed that they recognised that they were nothing but dust. That is all that God wants. He does not desire to humiliate man, but only to get him to recognise the facts as they exist, in order that He may lift him up.

"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). A Christian 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; Col 3:10). The first man was created faultless. 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 recreated?