

## Sabbath School Lesson #11 – The Christian *and* Work – 5-11 December 2020

**C**hrist wants us to be steadfast in working. Thus, Paul admonishes: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). This, then, is a privilege and duty of every Christian, and every person in the world, for God is no respecter of persons. Christ died for all, and all alike may have the victory through Him. Amidst all the influences which draw away from truth and right, and swell the mighty tide that is sweeping downward to perdition, we may stand like immovable rocks, breasting the current of worldliness and sin, and maintaining the principles of our righteous King. This we can do by faith. The apostle Paul says, “But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 57). And John writes, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). By faith we see what cannot be discerned by the natural eye. By faith Moses, at the court of Pharaoh, “endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” This is why it is that men by faith “out of weakness were made strong” (Hebrews 11:34). The psalmist writes, “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8). Peter, quoting the Psalmist’s words on the day of Pentecost said, “I foresaw the Lord always before my face.” The Lord is there; He is at our right hand to help us; as Paul said to the people at Athens, He is not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27). And it only requires the eye of faith to assure our hearts of this fact.

**Sunday: The Many Sides of Work** – Whatsoever we think of many sides of work, it is a popular error, fostered by many thoughtless Christians, that work is a part of the curse that has come because of sin. This is a grave error. Man was set to work by the Creator as soon as he was created. The command was: “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it and, to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). In Eden, man was given work to do, but it was not wearisome. After sin, work became wearisome; “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19), man was told. Work is not a part of the curse, but weariness from work is. If man had not fallen, he would have had work to do throughout eternity, but he would never have known anything of weariness. Work is a blessing, a privilege which makes man an associate with God, and which will be continued throughout eternity. Jesus said: “My Father worketh hitherto and I work” (John 5:17). The curse came upon the earth, making it less fruitful, and less responsive to man’s efforts, and so more labour had to be expended for much smaller returns than before; but when the earth is made new again, and men are restored to the first dominion, “they shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble,” for God’s people “shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” “They shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them” (Isaiah 65:21-23). There is a foolish notion prevalent that ordinary labour is degrading, especially to a minister of the Gospel. It is not all the fault of the ministers themselves, but largely the fault of the foolish people about them. They think that a minister must always be faultlessly attired, and that he must never soil his hands with ordinary manual labour. Such ideas are not biblical. Christ Himself was a carpenter, yet many professed followers of Him would be shocked if they should see their minister sowing and planting vegetables, or digging in the ground, or carrying harvest. There is a false dignity altogether too prevalent, which is utterly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel. Paul was not ashamed nor afraid to labour. This he did not merely occasionally, but day after day while he was engaged in preaching (see Acts 18:3-4). He said, “These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20:34). He was speaking to the leaders of the church when he said, “I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (verse 35).

**Monday: Work and Nurture** – It is contrary to Scripture to refuse to work and be idle or to endeavour to do as little work as possible in a given time and yet demand that you are paid much for it. It is contrary to Scripture injunction, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). This is not an arbitrary commandment, but one which, like everything right, grows out of the very nature of things. “In all labour there is profit”

(Proverbs 14:23). This has no reference to pecuniary remuneration; the profit is in the labour itself. Work or labour elevates. Every man degenerates physically, mentally, and morally by idleness. A man who idles his time away, or who slights his work, or who purposely does less work in a given time than he is able to do, is sure to lose his manhood. Even though he get full pay, and more than pay for his time, he suffers a loss which nothing can make good. So far at least as any man's own personal profit is concerned, it would certainly be far better for him to labour hard for no wages, than to live a life of idleness with a regular income.

**Tuesday: Work and Excellence** – It must be remembered that we are not to 'work for a living.' "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27). Further, the Lord tells us not to be anxious about what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or with what we shall be clothed; "for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:31-33). We are not to labour in order to get a living, but to labour because God has given it to us, and has said, "Six days shalt thou labour" (Exodus 20:9). It is evident that if these scriptures were believed and followed, there could be no labour troubles. A Christian can no more quarrel with his employer, or go on strike, than he can lie or steal. If your hand finds what to do, or work for an employer, you are to do all you can, in the best way that you can, whether you get little or much. Now a word as to the ethics of strikes, beyond that which is settled by the labour principle already set forth. Suppose we are oppressed: the Lord tells us to expect tribulation in this world. "Do not rich men oppress you?" (James 2:6). But "the just" do not resist, even when condemned and killed (James 5:6). Jesus said: "Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." "And if any man shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (Matthew 5:39-40). This is not out of date or impractical; it is a rule for Christians; we are considering the matter from the Christian's point of view. "Love seeketh not her own," and "love is the fulfilling of the law;" therefore he who strikes for higher pay, even though it be justly due him, is violating the law of God. It is not for true Christians to engage in labour strikes for higher pay, as is common nowadays. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Every evil thing, every deed of violence that a man does, comes back upon himself. "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own head" (Psalm 7:15, 16). Striving and fighting for that which we desire to have will never obtain for us anything that is real and lasting.

**Wednesday: Work and Spirituality** – As we physically work, let us remember to also spiritually work, that is, by remembering that it is not this world, but the one to come, that we as Christians are to seek. Let those have this world who will. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). And it is certain that he who gains this world does so at the expense of his soul. Gain is not godliness; "but godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:6-9).

**Thursday: Work and Stewardship** – "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse," and "if any man be in Christ; he is a new creation;" Christians are to live in this earth as though there had never been any curse. With them "old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new; and all things are of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). As stewards, we owe our lives to the world. And Paul's words are true for all: "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Romans 1:14). If the world did owe us a living, and we were obliged to depend on it, we should surely die; for it would never pay the debt; it cannot give life. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17). "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25); and since the life of the Lord has been given for the world, it is evident that that portion which is in us belongs to the world also. While it is true that we are not to work merely for a living, it is nevertheless a Divine commandment that if a man will not work he shall not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). If a man, therefore, for any reason whatever, if he refuses to work when he is able to work, and there is work to do, he deserves to starve; and whoever assists or encourages him in his idleness is encouraging disobedience to God.