

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – Crisis of Identity – 26 Dec 2020-1 January 2021

Christ would have you know that not only has God made ample provision for your salvation, but He pleads with you to accept His mercy, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). This wonderful promise seems too much to be true, but it is true. Think of it! A man that is thoroughly defiled by sin, made as pure as the snow fresh from heaven. That is the wonder of the universe.

Sunday: “Hear, O Heavens!” – The Lord called upon Israel to listen to His Word, and so are we to silently listen to Him. “The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Habakkuk 2:20). Why keep silent? – Because *He speaks*, and we need to hear. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken” (Isaiah 1:2). “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). There is a good reason why people as a general thing find it so difficult to understand the Word of the Lord, and that is, that they do not keep still long enough to hear what He says. If when a teacher began to speak, all his hearers should at once fall to disputing with one another, and to questioning and contradicting him, no one would wonder at their not understanding him; and none would be warranted in saying that he spoke so indistinctly or in so obscure a manner that he could not be understood. If they should make this complaint, they would merit the retort, ‘If you would but keep still, and listen, you would have no difficulty in understanding.’ This is exactly the way it is when the Lord speaks. No sooner is a word uttered, than people begin to clamour; without giving quiet consideration to His Word, or even waiting to hear what He has to say, they begin, ‘I do not see how that can be; yes, but then how about this?; That does not harmonise with the other statement; what do you think of that?; ‘what is your opinion about this matter?; it cannot mean that; this is what it means; and so on without limit. No wonder they do not understand. If a learned professor should begin to speak upon his special subject, all sensible persons would respectfully and attentively listen, because they would consider that the only wise thing to do is to listen when one wiser than they speaks; and they would strain their ears not to miss a word, so that they might understand. Should we not much more silently listen when the Lord of the universe, “the only wise God” (see Romans 16:27; Jude 1:25), speaks?

Monday: Rotten Ritualism – When the Jews at Sinai volunteered to work God’s works for Him, they undertook their own salvation. They ignored the history of Abraham, and God’s covenant with him, to which their attention had been specially called. God is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; so, in harmony with His covenant with Abraham, He did not cast off the people, but endeavoured to teach them of Himself and His salvation, even out of their own unbelief. He gave them a system of sacrifices and offerings, and a daily and yearly round of ceremonies that were exactly in keeping with the law which they had elected to keep, namely, the law of works. Of course this sacrificial system could not save them any more than could the broken law of works out of which it grew. Any man who had understanding enough to know the nature of sin and the necessity for atonement, had sense enough to know that pardon and righteousness could never be obtained by the ceremonies connected with the tabernacle. The very offering of a sacrifice indicated that death is the wages and fruit of sin. But anyone could see that the life of a lamb, a goat, or a bullock, was not worth as much as a man’s own life. Therefore none of those animals, nor all of them together, could answer for the life of a single man. And so thousands of rams, or even a human sacrifice, could not atone for a single sin (Micah 6:6-7).

The faithful among the people understood this well. David said, after he had committed a great sin, “Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering” (Psalm 51:16). God, through the prophets, taught the people: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?” “I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats” (Isaiah 1:11). “Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto Me” (Jeremiah 6:20). There was no virtue in them, for the law had only “a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things,” and could “never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Hebrews 10:1). It would of course have been better, nay, the very best thing, if the

people of Israel had preserved the simple and strong faith of Abraham and Moses, in which case they would have had no tabernacle but the one “which the Lord pitched, and not man;” no High Priest except Christ Himself, “made an High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek;” no limit to the priesthood, but every one of them a priest “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;” no law but “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ;” in short, only the reality, and not the mere shadow. But since the people did not believe, it was a wonderful exhibition of God's forbearance, that He gave them what must have served as a continual object lesson – “weakness and unprofitableness” (Hebrews 7:18) of the law of works was always apparent to every thoughtful person; when the soul became awakened, that law whose only profit was conviction, whose only power was death, directed them to Christ, to whom it shut them up for freedom and life. It made evident to them that in Christ, in Him alone, they find salvation. The truth as it is in Jesus, is the truth that sanctifies.

Tuesday: The Argument of Forgiveness – God does not tell us to apply our reason to the task of figuring out a way of salvation but says, “Come now, and let *us* reason *together*.” Who does the “us” include? Why, ourselves and the Lord, of course. The trouble is that so many read that call, and then they proceed forthwith to begin to reason alone, leaving the Lord out altogether. Then they come to fatal conclusions. We are to reason together with the Lord. Well, it is only reasonable that in reasoning with the Lord we should defer to Him, and let His reason direct. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Even “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.” So it is not with our mind that we are to reason about the things of God, but with the mind of the Lord. First we are to submit to the Lord, that He may put in us the mind that was in Christ, and then we shall see clearly, for we shall be walking in the light as He is in the light. Then it is that the blood of Jesus Christ is which cleanseth us from all sin. That which seems foolishness when looked at from a human point of view, is very reasonable when seen with the mind of God; for as “God is love,” and as He “delighteth in mercy,” it is the most natural thing for God to save sinners. But it is none the less wonderful, for the smallest of God's ways affords matter for the never-ending wonder of man.

Wednesday: To Eat or Be Eaten – The unreasonable and wicked man is the man who has not faith, and the man who has not faith is the man who does not accept God's word without question. “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:19-20). What can anybody say to that? Only that he believes and accept it, or that he does not. To say the latter is to say that God is a liar, and that is the height of folly. Manifestly, therefore, when the Lord calls us to come and reason together with Him, He means us to listen with reverent humility; to accept what He says without any gainsaying.

Thursday: Ominous Love Song – God has done everything for men. “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4), says the Lord. Every power to act that the man has, every capability of sinning, has been because of the grace of God perverted. Our very existence is because of the grace of God. Our life is the breathing in of the grace of God; but if we do not consciously accept God, if we do not yield to Him, of what use is the life? “What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Then those who breathe in the grace of God do it in vain if they do not acknowledge it. O, the wonderful patience of God! Day after day and year after year He showers His grace. He causes His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sends His rain on the just and the unjust. He sends the fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. He is witnessing of Himself all the time, and has patiently kept it up year after year, while we were groveling like the beast, not recognising it. But if we begin to recognise it, what can we not expect of the Lord? “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10). We are saved by the same thing that reconciles us. In His death He gave His life to us, and when we recognise that, and as we are recognising it, we are saved by His life. And when God asks, “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?” who shall presume to say that there is something that He has overlooked?