

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – The Roots of Restlessness – 10-16 July 2021

Christ would have us learn the root of restlessness. “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). It was envy of the honour given to the Son of God which led Lucifer, “son of the morning” (Isaiah 14:12), to rebel against the government of God and to seek to put himself on an equality with God. He said: “I will ascend above the heights of the cloud; I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14). Failing in this attempt to usurp the authority of God in heaven, “he was cast out into the earth” (Revelation 12:9), and here he has fostered the same spirit of envy against God and His Son. Satan puts envy into men. When Joseph told a dream “to his father and to his brethren his brethren envied him,” “and the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph in Egypt” (Genesis 37:10-11; Acts 7:9); but he who was thus the object of their unjust envy was used by God to deliver them from death by famine. When the Lord sent Moses to Egypt “to be ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35), his work in behalf of the people was not appreciated, and “they envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord” (Psalms 106:16). When the Son of God Himself appeared on earth to accomplish His work in behalf of man, “the God of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) aroused the same spirit of envy against Him in hearts of Church leaders. Satan caused Church leader to charge Christ with rebellion against properly constituted government. The very crime of which Lucifer was himself actually guilty, he inspired men to charge upon the Son of God! “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” This shows the working of selfishness, for “love envieth not” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Sunday: Jesus Brings Division – As a child grows there can develop a spiritual paradox between the conscience of the individual and the authority of the family structure. As children, we are commanded to honour and obey our parents. This is an authority that must be respected. But in matters of faith we must regard the Word of God as a higher authority. Notice the paradox: on one hand, “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12); and on the other hand, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37). When there is disagreement on what we understand truth to mean, we must both honour our parents and follow our conscience. This can be extremely difficult to do if your family ask you to do things directly contrary to the Bible. In such cases, the higher authority of the Word of God must decide the decision, but this does not mean that we cease to respect or disown our parents. To cease to respect our parents would cut a God ordained channel of blessing.

Monday: Selfishness – All action is based on two fundamental principles. These principles are love and selfishness. Everyone good action is an expression of the principle of love; every evil action is an expression of some form of selfishness. The principle of love leads the actor to forget self and labour for others. All the great work of creation is an expression of this principle. When God created the world, it was not for Himself, but for man. Every step in this creation is an expression of the same principle. The strength of the animal kingdom is devoted to nourish the vegetables; and, in turn, the vegetable kingdom does not toil for itself. The little seed cast into the earth expends all its energy to produce a beautiful foliage-covered tree, to be enjoyed by others; after years of patient toil, it is covered with blossoms of fragrance, which shed forth their sweet perfume to delight others; and finally its luscious fruit is produced, not for the tree itself to devour, but for the nourishment of others. In like manner, all the works of God in the earth are living illustrations of the principle of love. The apostle expressed a great truth when he said, “God is love.” God’s acts are acts of love.

The second principle is just the opposite of this. In the works of love another than the actor is always the object of the action; in the second principle, self is the great centre and ultimate object of every act. God is the personification of the first; Satan of the second. While all the works of God are an expression of love, all the acts of Satan are acts of selfishness. The cause of his fall was the desire to have self-exalted, – to become “like the Most High.” In leading man into sin, Satan use the same principle, – a desire on the part of man to be elevated, and become as gods. Christ seeks to redeem men from the state of selfishness.

Tuesday: Ambition – Ambition caused Lucifer's fall. Mark the contrast between Christ and Satan. Christ had everything by right, being God by nature, yet He resigned all to put on humanity to save man. He would not look out for His own interests, and let others look out for themselves; He emptied Himself, and thought only of others. Satan had nothing of his own, but only that which was given him, yet he designed to seize everything. He was a created being, yet he thought that he ought to be God, and that he could be. He would seize what his ambition craved, no matter what the consequences of others. This is the spirit of antichrist. Remember that selfish ambition is never satisfied. The man who covets ten thousand pounds craves ten thousand more when he has that. The man who thinks that his happiness depends upon his getting the farm that joins his, still wants the land that joins his after he has obtained the first lot; and he keeps on wanting the land that joins his, as long as he lives. History tells us, Alexander and Napoleon were never satisfied with conquest. And so it would have been with Satan, if it had been possible for him to carry his mad ambition into effect, and become like God. He thought that that would satisfy him; but if he had got that, he would not have been content. Nothing would have done then but to put God out of the way, so that he could reign alone. This is evident from what he really tried to do. When Christ was here on earth, representing God to men, Satan constantly tried to kill Him. It was at his instigation that the men of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus headlong down the precipice, and the Jews often took up stones to stone Him. It was he that put it into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord, and he it was that stirred up the rulers of the Jews to crucify Him.

Wednesday: Hypocrisy – “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:9). These are the words which John the Baptist spoke to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism. These men were corrupt at heart. Their character is described by our Saviour Himself in Matthew 23:13-33, where they are said to have outwardly appeared righteous, while within they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Both John the Baptist and our Saviour called them vipers. These men were lineal descendants of Abraham, and were of the stock of Israel, but they had lost the spirit of Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth (Hebrews 11:13). They did not expect their portion in this life, nor an earthly inheritance; but they looked for a city from Heaven, and an inheritance in the new earth, wherein righteousness alone should dwell (2 Peter 3:13). And they knew that the possession of righteousness would be the only passport to that heavenly inheritance. The Pharisees, on the other hand, had ceased to look for a Messiah who should finally reign over a righteous nation, and who should prepare subjects for that kingdom by cleansing them from sin. They did not look at their hearts, which were corrupt, but only on the outward appearance, which was fair. Consequently, seeing no sin in themselves, they felt no need of a Saviour. Afterward, when Christ was talking to the wicked Jews, he said, “If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39). The apostle Paul also says, “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). The Pharisees who came to John to be baptized thought that the fact that they could prove their descent from Abraham, would insure them a place in the kingdom of Christ; but Paul shows that they had turned the matter around. They could only prove themselves children by bringing forth such works of repentance as would show them to be Christ's. There are many today who have as erroneous ideas as the Pharisees and Sadducees had.

Thursday: Uprooting Restlessness – In Christ we have the rest and the inheritance; but in order to be made partakers of Christ we must “hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Hebrews 3:14). Jesus says, “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Yet in the very same talk He said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you” (John 14:27). What! peace in the midst of tribulation? Yes; read the whole verse and notice that He says, “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” To have tribulation, and yet not be troubled; to be in the midst of danger, and yet have no fear; to be in the heat of battle, and yet enjoy perfect peace, – truly this is giving in a far different way from what the world gives. The way to uproot restlessness is to be wholly in Christ.