

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – Understanding Human Nature – 8-14 October 2022

Christ would have us understand how the Scriptures defines human nature and the condition of human beings at death so that we are not deceived. “What Is Man?” – This is a question which we must not forget to answer, and the answer must be kept in mind. “The Lord God formed 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). In the original, literally, He “formed man dust of the ground.” So that God could say to him, “Dust thou art.” God took dust, and set it over the works of His hands. In all his glory and honour, man was but dust. The power was God’s and so was the glory. How wonderful is God’s power! With a handful of dust He can rule a world! No wonder that He will not despise “a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17), that is, a heart that is but dust, – contrite: ground together, pulverised, – and which continually acknowledges that it is nothing. God will not despise it, because nothing is small or insignificant with Him, and He can do wonders with it. His glory is in doing the greatest things with the weakest instrument. The fact that God created man dust of the earth, and crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the work of His hands, is the joy and strength of the converted soul. In the facts of the creation of man, we learn what God can do with the contrite soul that is “a new creature” in Christ. Man is nothing, but God is everything. Whoever has learned this truth, has the key to the wisdom of the universe.

Sunday: “A Living Being” – What is your answer to the question asked: Is there an immaterial soul or spirit that consciously survives physical death? In the record of creation, however, and in many other places, the whole man is called a soul. This is perhaps the most common use of the word. As such it is by no means synonymous with “spirit.” In Genesis 2:7 we read that “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Note well that it does not say that a soul was breathed in him, but that the man that God formed, himself became a living soul as soon as he received the breath of life from God. The term “living soul” is not, however, distinctive. It is applied to the lower animals as well as to man. The same Hebrew words that in Genesis 2:7 are translated “living soul,” are in Genesis 1:24 translated “living creature.” If in Genesis 2:7 we had, “man became a living creature,” it would be perfectly correct; so also would it be as proper to translate Genesis 1:24 thus, “And God said, let the earth bring forth the living soul after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth, after his kind.” Indeed, even in the English translation the fact appears that the lower animals are called living souls, as in Revelation 16:3: “And the second angel poured out his vile upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea.”

Monday: “The Soul Who Sins Shall Die” – What do you say to one who argues that it is not fair that by one man sin and death came and “death passed upon all men” (Romans 5:12)? Note the justice here. Death passed upon all men, “for that all have sinned.” “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20). And this is also a necessary consequence of the fact that sin contains death in it, and that death cannot come in any other way than by sin. Death cannot come upon a man because of the sin of another. It must come because of his own sin; for if a man has not sinned, there is nothing to bring death upon him. But since all have sinned, therefore of necessity death passed upon all.

Tuesday: The Spirit Returns to God – What would you say to one who believes that when man dies his ‘spirit’ goes up to heaven and lives up there with God leaving the dead body in the grave? The Scripture often quoted in support of that argument is Ecclesiastes 12:7: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.” It is natural for men to appeal first and most directly to those sources from which they expect the most efficient help. So the advocates of man’s natural immortality, when put to the task of showing what scriptures they regard as containing proof of their position, almost invariably make their first appeal to the text here quoted. In the examination of this text, and all other of a like nature, let it ever be remembered that the question at issue is: Has man in his nature a constituent element, which is an independent entity, and which,

when the body dies, keeps right on in uninterrupted consciousness, being capable of exercising in a still higher degree out of the body all the functions of intelligence and activity which it manifested through the body, and destined, whether a subject of God's favour, or of his threatened and merited wrath, to live so long as God himself exists? Does this text assert anything of this kind? Does it state that from which even such an inference can be drawn? But how could the spirit return to God, it is asked, if it was not conscious? – In the manner Job describes. "If he [God] set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust" (Job 34:14-15). This text speaks of God's gathering to Himself the "breath" of man: something which no one supposes to be capable of a separate, conscious existence. Moreover, this spirit and breath, given for a while to man, God calls His own; and depriving man of it He calls "gathering it to Himself," an expression fully as strong as "the spirit shall return to God who gave it." Both texts simply teach this: that at death man returns to his original elements; that which was born of the dust returns to the dust, and the spirit or breath, having come directly from God, returns to His keeping. There is no more reason for supposing that the spirit, as it returns to God, is conscious, than there is in supposing that the dust is conscious, or that the spirit was conscious before God bestowed it upon man, or that the breath, while in man's nostrils, was conscious. The dust of which man was formed was inanimate; man, after he was formed by the Creator, was inanimate, unconscious; the spirit while yet in the hands of God was without consciousness; but when the man and the spirit were brought together, conscious existence was the result. How this result was obtained is a secret known only to the Author of life.

Wednesday: "The Dead Know Nothing" – What do you say to those who believe their dead ones become guardian angels? Job says: "Thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevailedst for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them" (Job 14:19-21). This testimony shows that after a man dies he has no knowledge of what befalls his friends here. It plainly contradicts the idea that our dead friends become our guardian angels, watching over us, sympathising with us in our sorrows, and rejoicing with us in our prosperity. It plainly declares that after a man is dead he knows nothing of what befalls his children in this world. Here is another testimony still more decisive; "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything.... Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6). This text declares positively that the dead know nothing concerning things in this life. They have no part in anything that takes place under the sun. If a minister in our Seventh-day Adventist Church were to do a "posthumous investiture" for a dead man, as it happened in 2020, we would know that there is no light in that professed minister, for the dead know nothing.

Thursday: Resting With the Forefathers – If someone still doubts that the dead are still conscious, what other Bible text can you share with them? – Here are the A-Z texts: A: Genesis 3:19: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." The whole of Adam is here addressed, no part is here exempted for consciousness in death. B: Deuteronomy 31:16: "Thou shalt sleep with thy fathers." When the Bible speaks of a man in life, it means the whole rational, intelligent man; in death, that the language suddenly changes its meaning and refers only to the body, leaving the soul, the man proper, to fly off unnoticed to a higher state of activity and conscious being. Mark, then, that it is the Moses that lived, that was sentenced to sleep with his fathers (see, also, 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 2:10). C: Job 3:11-19. D: Job 10:21-22. E: Job 14:10-12. F: Verse 21. G: Job 17:13-16. H: Psalm 6:5. I: Psalm 88:10. J: Psalm 115:17. K: Psalm 146:3-4. L: Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10. M: Isaiah 26:19. N: Isaiah 38:18-19. O: Daniel 12:2. P: Hosea 13:14. Q: Matthew 27:52. R: John 5:28-29. S: John 7:34. T: John 11:11-14. U: Acts 2:29, 34. V: Acts 7:60. W: 1 Corinthians 15:20. X: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. Y: 2 Peter 2:9: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." This shows that the unjust do not enter into a place of punishment at death, but are reserved to the day of judgment. Where? In general receptacle of the dead, the grave (Job 21:30). Z: Revelation 20:5. "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished."