

Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Beware of Covetousness – 25 February-3 March 2023

Christ “said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). This exhortation was enforced by the parable of the rich man who, in consequence of abundant crops, proposed to pull down his barns, and build greater, so that he might say to himself, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” But God said to him, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” The fool, in the Bible use of the term, is the one who says in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). The rich man acted as though his life depended solely upon himself; and thus he said in his heart, “There is no God.” But this parable is not for the rich alone. The poor need it as well. The exhortation, “Beware of covetousness,” is needed by the poor as well as by the rich. The poor man who bends all his energies towards the accumulation of wealth, or the one who has no hope or expectation of becoming rich, but who is in constant anxiety over the future, is trusting in earthly goods just as surely as any rich man. Whoever acts though his life depended wholly on itself, is thereby denying the existence of God. In the sixth chapter of Matthew the Saviour tells us that we cannot serve two masters; if we serve mammon we cannot serve God. Then He proceeds to show us that serving mammon consists in anxious care and worry about the future. Anxious thought as to what we shall eat, drink, and wear, is a characteristic of the heathen. Therefore, a professed Christian who allows himself to doubt, or who is covetously anxious about the future, is denying the faith. Covetousness is idolatry. “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.” For “my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19). “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 33:3-4).

Sunday: The Ultimate Original Sin? – We know that sin originated with Satan, but what was the cause of Satan’s fall, and what is the ultimate original sin? We go back to the time when sin first entered the universe, and we find that the cause of it was pride, and claiming of attributes that belong to God alone. In Isaiah 14:12-14 we read the following description of the fall of Satan: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” This gives in plain language the sin of Satan. He aspired to be equal with God; he coveted the position that belonged only to the divine Word, the Son of God; and there the spirit of antichrist first sprung into existence. Thus, we learn that pride, and undue regard for self, forgetfulness of the fact that no one can have anything except from God, and his a desire to be equal, in some respects at least, to God, led to Satan’s fall. And this cause of his fall was exactly the same in nature as that by which he fell; and it is the identical principle by which Satan has perpetuated sin in the world until the present time. We read his self-exaltation: “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 27:17). Dependent entirely upon God for all the wisdom and glory that he had, he did not glorify God, but assumed that all his talents sprang from himself; and so, as he disconnected himself in his pride from the Source of light, he became the prince of darkness. Even thus it was with man.

Monday: An Accursed Thing in the Camp – What caused the failure in the Camp? The incident shows our dependence on God. When they trusted in themselves, they failed. And what was the reason that God was not among them? Because there was sin among them. The sin of Achan was imputed to the entire camp, until the offender was searched out and punished. The record says, “But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing; for Achan... took of the accursed thing.” Yet there is no evidence that anybody besides Achan was concerned in the theft or knew of it. The Lord showed by this that He would have His people have a care for one another. We are each our brother’s keeper. The Lord has

said, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and shall not suffer sin upon him" (Leviticus 19:17). When the body of believers, then, searches out the erring one, and rebukes him, it is doing that which is necessary to its own existence. Just as a man cannot be said to be sound if one of his limbs is diseased, so the body of believers is not pure unless each individual member is walking orderly. Each person should consider how much responsibility attaches to his course. By a wrong course he may involve many others in his own ruin; so true it is that "none of us liveth to himself."

Tuesday: The Heart of Judas – What was in the heart of Judas that relates to the sin of covetousness? Ellen White tells us: "Judas was treasurer for the disciples, and from their little store he had secretly drawn for his own use, thus narrowing down their resources to a meager pittance. He was eager to put into the bag all that he could obtain. The treasure in the bag was often drawn upon to relieve the poor; and when something that Judas did not think essential was bought, he would say, Why is this waste? why was not the cost of this put into the bag that I carry for the poor? Now the act of Mary was in such marked contrast to his selfishness that he was put to shame; and according to his custom, he sought to assign a worthy motive for his objection to her gift. Turning to the disciples, he asked, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." Judas had no heart for the poor. Had Mary's ointment been sold, and the proceeds fallen into his possession, the poor would have received no benefit" {DA 559.2}.

Wednesday: Ananias and Sapphira – What is the implication of the negative record of Ananias and Sapphira? "The apostles encountered those in the church who professed godliness while they were secretly cherishing iniquity. Ananias and Sapphira acted the part of deceivers, pretending to make an entire sacrifice for God, when they were covetously withholding a portion for themselves. The Spirit of truth revealed to the apostles the real character of these pretenders, and the judgments of God rid the church of this foul blot upon its purity. This signal evidence of the discerning Spirit of Christ in the church was a terror to hypocrites and evildoers. They could not long remain in connection with those who were, in habit and disposition, constant representatives of Christ; and as trials and persecution came upon His followers, those only who were willing to forsake all for the truth's sake desired to become His disciples. Thus, as long as persecution continued, the church remained comparatively pure. But as it ceased, converts were added who were less sincere and devoted, and the way was open for Satan to obtain a foothold" – EG White {GC 44.1}.

Thursday: Overcoming Covetousness – How can we escape covetousness? Like all sins, there is a way of escape for the sin of covetousness. It is the will of God that men should live without sin, and He has made provision that they may do so. We are inclined to think that at times we cannot help being overcome, but this is a mistake. Paul writes, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to men; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The way is there; the only trouble is that we fail to see it. We look at the temptation, we look at ourselves, and we seem to be hopelessly trapped. Ah, we do not see Christ! He is the way of escape. There is no sin in that Way. We have but to see and fly to it, and we are safe. It is only when we look away from Him that danger comes. Let us claim God's promises. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16). God does not upbraid us, does not taunt us with our weakness. A child has not the strength of a man, and no father will ridicule his infant child because of its weakness. It's very helplessness appeals to his sympathy. God says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:13-14). We need to "ask in faith, nothing wavering," for "without faith it is impossible to please Him." Be exhorted: "Be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5); and "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).