

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – Faith Against All Odds – 27 April-3 May 2024

Christ would have us exercise His faith against all odds. The psalmist says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). It is a fatal mistake to let anything come between us and the word of God, for thereby we debar the word from entering our hearts. The word of God in the heart, keeps each one from sin, and this is the greatest good that can come to any one of the children of Adam. But when something comes between us and the word of God, the safeguard against sin is not there.

Sunday: God’s Word Alone – How did the word of God impact the Reformers, and how does it influence our lives today? When the Jews sent priests and Levites to inquire of John the Baptist, “Who art thou?” he replied, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias” (John 1:22-23). He was, in so far as he attracted the notice of men, the personification of the voice of God. The same may be said of the great reformers who have lived in other ages of the world. They have stood out from amidst the multitudes of their day, as salient figures in a conflict between God’s word and the word of man. So it was with John Wycliffe, the first of the great reformers of modern times. Catholic prelates opposed him with the word of man in its most exalted form, – the bulls of “infallible” popes; and he replied to them with “Thus saith the Lord.” Wycliffe was sometimes surrounded by friends, but never leaning upon human support, he faced the foes of divine truth without flinching, and in his work was revealed again the truth of the prophet’s utterance, “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, . . . but the word of our God shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:6-7). The life of Wycliffe as a reformer is but a record of the battles of the word of God with religious error in the form of the traditions of men, and of its triumphs over them. But Wycliffe himself well knew that the conflict waged by them was not with him. At one time, in his old age, the faith of his friends and supporters yielded and could not stand against all odds, and Wycliffe was brought to trial before the highest ecclesiastical tribunal in England, and his enemies sought to force him to retract the truth. “But Wycliffe did not retract; he would not dissemble. He fearlessly maintained his teachings and repelled the accusations of his persecutors. Losing sight of himself, of his position, of the occasion, he summoned his hearers before the divine tribunal, and weighed their sophistries and deceptions in the balances of eternal truth. The power of the Holy Spirit was felt in the council room. A spell from God was upon the hearers. They seemed to have no power to leave the place. As arrows from the Lord’s quiver, the Reformer’s words pierced their hearts. The charge of heresy, which they had brought against him, he with convincing power threw back upon themselves. Why, he demanded, did they dare to spread their errors? For the sake of gain, to make merchandise of the grace of God?” {GC 90.2}. “With whom, think you,” he finally said, “are ye contending? with an old man on the brink of the grave? No! with Truth — Truth which is stronger than you, and will overcome you.” — Wylie, b. 2, ch. 13. So saying, he withdrew from the assembly, and not one of his adversaries attempted to prevent him {GC 90.3}. The battle in Wycliffe’s time is to be re-enacted. We have reached the climax of the battle. Over the issue of which day is the Sabbath — which of the signs of the two opposing spiritual powers is to be given our honour — the battle will be fought to its conclusion. If you cannot keep Sabbath now, you will have no faith to keep it against the odds at Sunday Law.

Monday: Passing on God’s Word – How did the reformer, William Tyndale, taste the truthfulness of the word of God that “we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Corinthians 13:8)? Tyndale was persecuted in England at the time he translated the Bible in the English language, and so he sought shelter in Germany. “Here he began the printing of the English New Testament. Twice the work was stopped; but when forbidden to print in one city, he went to another. At last he made his way to Worms, where, a few years before, Luther had defended the gospel before the Diet. In that ancient city were many friends of the Reformation, and Tyndale there prosecuted his work without further hindrance. Three thousand copies of the New Testament were soon finished, and another edition followed in the same year” {GC 246.4}. “With great earnestness and perseverance he continued his labors. Notwithstanding the English authorities had guarded their ports with the strictest

vigilance, the word of God was in various ways secretly conveyed to London and thence circulated throughout the country. The papists attempted to suppress the truth, but in vain. The bishop of Durham at one time bought of a bookseller who was a friend of Tyndale his whole stock of Bibles, for the purpose of destroying them, supposing that this would greatly hinder the work. But, on the contrary, the money thus furnished, purchased material for a new and better edition, which, but for this, could not have been published. When Tyndale was afterward made a prisoner, his liberty was offered him on condition that he would reveal the names of those who had helped him meet the expense of printing his Bibles. He replied that the bishop of Durham had done more than any other person; for by paying a large price for the books left on hand, he had enabled him to go on with good courage" {GC 247.1}.

Tuesday: Enlightened by the Spirit – The Lesson writer rightly tells us: "The Reformers saw clearly that the Holy Spirit — not the priests, prelates, and popes — was the infallible interpreter of Scripture." What lesson should we learn from the reformers? If we sincerely love the truth, search for the truth as for the hidden treasure, and are willing to follow the truth wherever it leads us, God will help us to have a mind that is able to discern the deep things of God. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14), and only the mind cleansed by the sanctification of the Spirit can discern truth. The Scriptures, given by the "Spirit of Christ" (1 Peter 1:10-11), are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Let us go to the Word of God for guidance. Let us seek for a "Thus saith the Lord." Let us take the Word of God as it reads. Let us allow the Spirit of Christ to work in us, not try to work His Spirit. The work in us and through us will be accomplished by Christ in us and working through us. The Lord says that His kingdom is to be established in the earth "not by might, nor by power," but by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

Wednesday: Christ Alone . . . Grace Alone – Are we saved by our faith or by the faith of Jesus Christ alone? Much is lost, in reading the Scriptures, by not noting exactly what they say. In Galatians 2:16 we have literally, "the faith of Jesus Christ," just as in Revelation 14:12 we have "the faith of Jesus." He is the Author and Finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2). God has "dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3), in giving Christ to every man. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17), and Christ is the Word of God. All things are of God. It is He who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins. There is, therefore, no opportunity for anyone to plead that his faith is weak. He may not have accepted and made use of the gift, but there is no such thing as 'weak faith.' A man may be 'weak in faith,' that is, may be afraid to depend on faith, but faith itself is as strong as the Word of God. There is no faith but the faith of Christ; everything else professing to be faith is a spurious article. Here is comfort. Whoever will accept the faith of Jesus, has that which is as sure to work righteousness in him, and to save him, as the victory of Christ over sin and death is assured. He gives to us His own tried and approved faith. It has not a flaw, and we need not fear to use it: it will not fail us in any contest. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We are saved by Christ's faith – it is His victorious experience and life as a Man that comforts the sinner (Hebrews 2:17-18). We are not exhorted to try to do as well as He did, or to try to exercise as much faith as He had, but simply to take His faith, let it work by love, and purify the heart.

Thursday: Obedience: The Fruit of Faith – What is the relationship between obedience and faith? Obedience is the fruit of faith. It is written of Abraham, "Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached beforehand the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:7-8). The Gospel which was preached to Abraham is the same that is for "all people," and which "shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations." To "every creature" the same is to be preached, and whoever believes it and is baptized, shall be saved. But in the Gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." The Gospel is preached "for the obedience of faith." Obedience carries a blessing with it, for it is written, "Blessed are they that do His commandments." "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (verse 9). Works are a fruit of faith; good works cannot come except by faith; faith, if it exists, must work (James 2:14-18).