

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – Controversies – 13-19 July 2024

Christ is without controversy the Lord of the Sabbath. “And He said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). The Sabbath is not something that is against man, a hard requirement, – something to hold him down, – but a thing calculated to help him in every way. But it is for man; that is, it is a blessing to a man only when he keeps it. When a man rejects that which is good, he has only the evil; so a blessing spurned leaves only a man helpless. The Creator, He who made the Sabbath for man, is the only one who can tell us what it is for, all human additions to the Sabbath are of no value. But this does not give any license to man to break the Sabbath. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8), is as valid a commandment as it was the day it was spoken from Sinai.

Sunday: Healing a Paralytic – How can we be careful to avoid the same trap that these men fell into: being so obsessed with the forms of religion that they lost sight of what really mattered in true religion (see James 1:27)? Even the scribes, with all their self-assumption, knew that it was blasphemy for man to assume to forgive sins against God. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” they asked when Christ said to the sick of the palsy, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” They were all right as to the power which alone could forgive sins, but their failure was in not recognising who Christ was. Jesus thereupon demonstrated “that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins” by healing the sinner bodily as well as spiritually. God gave to Jesus “power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life” to all who come to Him (John 17:1-2). Notice, Jesus said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), later in His prayer, Jesus said the Father gave Him “power over all flesh” (John 17:2), and He repeats this later, “saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18-20). By the power which He had to deliver the bodies of men from disease, He showed power to release their souls from sin. “For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then He saith to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men” (Matthew 9:5-8).

Monday: Calling Levi and the Question of fasting – Who are equal to tax collectors today and should we always sit with publicans? One may deny Christ by his association with others, even if he utters not a word. Peter’s mingling with the rude, unfeeling crowd in the court room of itself was a denial of Christ (Luke 22). Not that it was wrong to associate with sinners; this Jesus Himself did; He went in with publicans and sinners and ate with them. But let us remember that when Jesus associated with sinners, He did not try to make it appear that He was one of them. He associated with them to win them by His kindness and His example to a better life. And although His demeanour was such that they could associate with Him familiarly, yet when He most appeared to be one with them, there was always apparent the fact that He was far different from them. To stand in the crowd, or sit in the assembly where the rude jest and the coarse talk, and possibly the reviling of that which is good and pure, show that they are the enemies of Christ, is to deny Him, even though one say not a word. Unless one’s very presence is a rebuke to sin, it is a countenancing of it: and that is a denial of Christ. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-6).

Tuesday: the Lord of the Sabbath – In Mark 2:23-28 and Mark 3:1-6, is the Sabbath question. What principles of Sabbath keeping can you take away from these accounts and the challenges that we face in the modern age in keeping Sabbath? God works constantly, but by His Word – the Word by which He healed the sick. Such work pertains to the Sabbath day. But this work is not predicated on personal gain to God; it is gratuitous on His part. It is done at great sacrifice in that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16) even to heal and save lost mankind. Thus, we are guarded against deceiving ourselves with the thought that certain work which we very much desire to see accomplished, in which we shall derive personal gain, directly (such as salary) or

indirectly (such as job security), is a work of necessity. If any secular work can by any possibility benefit us – if we can possibly derive from it any personal gain – it is not a work of necessity. If you worked in a conventional hospital on Sabbath because the security of your job requires so, claim to be healing on Sabbath, it is not a work of mercy, but of selfishness, even though it is lawful in itself if performed on some secular day. But any work that has in it no possible element of selfishness, and from which we cannot in the remotest manner, or to the least degree, derive any personal gain, but which is wholly for the benefit of others, is lawful on the Sabbath day. In doing such work, cheerfully, we show ourselves to be children of God who bears the burdens of mankind because He cares for them, and loves them.

Moreover, even if a Sabbath-keeper were to work in a conventional hospital on Sabbath without deriving any personal gain, but engaged in dispensing drugs that “enfeebles the system, making it more susceptible to disease” (5T 311.1), he would not keep the Sabbath of the Lord. “It is the Lord’s purpose that His method of healing without drugs shall be brought into prominence in every large city through our medical institutions” (9T 168.4). Christ healed by miracles, but “God’s servants today could not work by means of miracles, because spurious works of healing, claiming to be divine, will be wrought” (LDE 169.2); He “has commissioned us to carry forward the medical missionary work that He began; in this work, men and women suffering from diseases are to be treated without drugs” (CH 393.1).

Keeping the Lord’s Sabbath involves adopting the Lord’s health laws. The apostle Paul tells about men “having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2), and there are very many who have got into that sad condition. Many will feel condemned by the truth that “excessive indulgence in eating and drinking is sin” (CH 50.3) and that “tea and coffee drinking is a sin” (CD 425.3), but have no notion of leaving off their evil ways. So long as conscience makes one uncomfortable over sins committed, there is hope of repentance and salvation; but what if you are offered a drug that could relieve you of all compunctions of conscience, while still “fulfilling the desires of the flesh” (Ephesians 2:3)? Many Sabbath-keepers take that approach; they neglect the Lord’s health laws, they sin by defiling the body temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19), they suffer pain, then they take drugs to deaden that pain, so that they can continue in sin with impunity. Many did so in ignorance that “God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). For Christ to keep His Sabbath in us, as He kept it in His ministry, we must not defile His body temple.

Wednesday: Sandwich Story: Part 1 – What is the unpardonable sin that the Jews committed? “The Jews had clear light as to the character and mission of Christ. They had evidence of His divinity in His resurrection and ascension, yet they would not receive Him and become His disciples. In stubbornly resisting clear light and evidence brought to them by the Holy Spirit of God, they committed the unpardonable sin. As in the case of Judas, so it was with the Jews. God gave him sufficient evidence concerning the course he was taking; but he failed to improve the light, and it became darkness to him. God gave abundant evidence to the Jewish nation. He asked “What more could I have done for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” [Isaiah 5:4.] Jesus told His disciples that the Jews would treat them as they had treated Him, and His predictions were speedily fulfilled. They heaped upon them every indignity, outrage, and cruelty that they could devise” {10LtMs, Lt 16, 1895, par. 21}.

Thursday: Sandwich Story: Part 2 – Did Christ just redefine family, as the writer says? We should not close this lesson without noting that which it teaches as to the relatives of Christ, and our relation to them. As He hung on the cross, He saw His mother standing by, and His beloved disciple John, and He said to His mother, “Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, behold thy mother!” John immediately recognised the relationship, by taking her to his own home. This is something more than a mere item of history. It is recorded to teach us that we stand in the closest relationship to all who are related to Christ. Jesus said, “For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35). Therefore we are to recognise all such as our own kindred, equally with those who are our kindred by ties of blood, even by the blood of Christ. This tie also binds us to all for whom Christ died; but of course those who have accepted the sacrifice of Christ are thereby made near. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).