

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – To Be Pleasing to God – 11-17 January 2025

Christ would have us know that through Him, we can be pleasing to God. The Lord is pleased and rejoices: “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17). “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Sunday: More Valuable Than You Can Imagine – Read Luke 15:11-32; what does the parable of the prodigal son reveal about God’s compassion and love? In the parable of the prodigal son we have this characteristic of God beautifully illustrated. Read the fifteenth of Luke, and note these points: (1) The son had received his full allowance from his father. (2) He went away and squandered his portion in riotous living. (3) When he went back to his father, he had not a penny left, but was in rags, and starving. (4) His father received him back with joy, running to meet him “when he was yet a great way off.” (5) Not a word of reproach was uttered. The father’s heart yearned for his son, and he was glad to see him coming back; reproaches might have sent him away again in despair. It is only loving-kindness that draws. (6) But this was not all. It was not enough for the father to receive him without reproaches, and allow him henceforth to abide at home portionless. No, the prodigal was received as a son, and restored to the position that he had before he went away. He was a son, and therefore an heir. Behold in this a picture of God’s dealing with wayward souls. He has given us all things. He has supplied us bountifully. Having received His good gifts, instead of glorifying Him with them, we have wasted them. He has received no better, and we have not been the gainers. With time and talents wasted, we cannot now render unto Him the service that we ought to and that we wish we could. What then? – Why, He who redeems us teaches us also to redeem the time; He receives us as sons, makes us heirs of Himself, and supplies all our need, “according to his riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19). He rejoices that we are now willing to serve Him, He spends no time in reproaches, but renews His gifts to us as freely as though we had never sinned. “O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:31).

Monday: Rejoicing with Gladness – Read Zephaniah 3:17; how does this verse shed light on the parable of the prodigal son? Read, again, Luke 15, especially verse 10. Often people misread Luke 15:10 as though it said that there is rejoicing among the angels of God when a sinner repents. That is no doubt true; for if “all the sons of God shouted for joy” when the world was first created, we may be sure that they have no less joy when a new creation appears; but what the text says is that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” It indicates that it is the Lord Himself who manifests and leads in the joy. The Lord our God is as genuinely glad at heart as is the man in the parable of the prodigal son. What a glorious thought that even here and now we can add to the joy of heaven, and, even if we cannot sing a note, we may increase the music of heaven! Every sinner saved adds to the harmonies of heaven a note, thus it is that “the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” is made known through the church unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10-11). Who would forego the pleasure of making the heart of God glad, and of hearing Him sing for joy? This joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). “The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17). His joy is the joy of a mighty One in His own strength, the joyful contemplation of His own work, just as when on the seventh day He rested from all His work, and delighted Himself with the sight of the perfection of the work which His hands had made. He rests in His love, and in it we may also rest, and rejoice and be glad for ever in that which He recreates.

Tuesday: Pleasing God? – Good questions are asked by the Lesson writer: ‘First, how could God Himself be delighted? Second, how could humans bring Him delight, particularly given our sinfulness?’ The answer to these questions is that only Christ can bring delight to His Father. Our participation is only accepted in Christ. We are “accepted in the beloved”

(Ephesians 1:6). We must be in Christ as the branch is in the vine, as the arm is in the body, as the stone is in the building, as the man-slayer was in the city of refuge. In vain shall we seek to please God, unless by union with Christ. We can bear no good fruit, can do nothing without Him. Well did Luther say, "All the prayings, teachings, and actings of men are, out of Christ, idolatry and sin in the sight of God." So, Paul says, "I count all things but loss and dung, that I may be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:8). We are "accepted in the beloved", that is, in Christ. But of whom is He the Beloved? He is the loved of God. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isaiah 42:1), says the Father. Christ, "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24), says, "I was by Him as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him" (Proverbs 8:30). Yea, God sent a voice from the excellent glory, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And Christ in his last agony says, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). If God is to be delighted, it is by His beloved Son. Let the substitute take place, let Christ be in us and be our life, and He will delight His Father. Let us, by faith, say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Wednesday: Living Stones – The question is still asked, how can we, as humans be a delight to God? We are to be the living house of God. The living God dwells in a living house; and only a spiritual house befits Him who is Spirit. Accordingly we read that, coming unto the Lord, "a living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). Jesus Christ is the tried and sure Foundation upon which all who would abide for ever must be built. "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18-22). The household of God is the church of the living God (1 Timothy 3:15), but only because each individual member is the dwelling-place of God. To each, the word comes: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"; "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 6:19; 3:16-17). When Jesus was asked how it was that He would manifest Himself to His disciples and not to the world, He replied: "If a man love Me, he may keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). The Word abiding in the heart sanctifies, so that the heart of each believer is the sanctuary of the living God. This fact is so clear that no more words are needed to make it appear, and we have therefore only to consider its wonderful force, and its practical application to us.

Thursday: A Worthy Goal – Read Mark 9:24; how much is enough faith? Enough to cause us to seek God's help. Put your will on the side of belief rather than of unbelief. God will not force us to believe. He throws up evidence before us, but only we can choose the faith option. When the Lord invites us to come boldly and ask in faith, to "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8), if we lack the faith, let us cry out "help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). "In Christ, God has provided means for subduing every sinful trait, and resisting every temptation, however strong. But many feel that they lack faith, and therefore they remain away from Christ. Let these souls, in their helpless unworthiness, cast themselves upon the mercy of their compassionate Saviour. Look not to self, but to Christ. He who healed the sick and cast out demons when He walked among men is the same mighty Redeemer today. Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." You can never perish while you do this – never" – Ellen G White {DA 429.1}.