

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – The Wrath of Divine Love – 25-31 Jan 2025

Christ reveals to us the character of the Lord whose “throne is in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all.” His character is manifest in the spirit of forgiveness shown in the dealings of the Lord with the children of Israel. “For their heart was not right with Him, and neither were they steadfast in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath” (Psalm 78:37, 38). These things are written to encourage us “that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The Lord is the same to-day as of old. “I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.... Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption” (Psalm 130:4-7). Let no one forget that the Lord is willing, and more than willing to forgive. If we were only as willing to confess our sins as He is to forgive them, the whole debt would be cancelled without delay.

Sunday: Grieved by Evil – Read Psalm 78; What does this passage convey about God’s response to His people’s repeated rebellions? We are no different from the Jews who “turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (verse 41). Instead of looking to Jesus, who is the truth, we look to the church, limiting “the Holy One of Israel.” Christ is the Word; He is the truth; and He sanctifies all who believe Him. The Bible is also the Word of God, because the Spirit of Christ was in the men who wrote, testifying through them, and because the Scriptures testify of Christ. It is the truth, and it sanctifies, because Christ is in the Word, and believers find Him there. When Moses by the Spirit said that the Word is not far off, that we should need some one to go to heaven and bring it down, or to the deep and bring it up, that we might do it, he meant Christ, as we learn from Romans 10:6-7. Christ cannot be separated from the Inspired Word. With these facts in mind, we may form a more correct idea of what it is to believe the truth and to be sanctified by it. It is a very common thing for people to get the idea that “the truth” consists in certain facts or points of doctrine, which have been set forth in the creeds and formulas of “the church.” Accordingly some men will hold to one set of ideas as “the truth,” and others to still different ones, just as they may regard one or another denomination as “the church.” The ancient Jews “limited the Holy One of Israel;” and that is just what is done by those who hold such narrow views of “the truth.” The truth does not consist in a few points of doctrine, nor in anything that can be formulated by man, but in “all the fulness of God” (Matthew 4:4), which is in Christ. It consists in “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” for all Scripture is profitable, and there is enough of it to make men perfect, “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17). Only those will be lost who “received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Truth itself must be loved and received. It is not our ideas of truth that will save us, but the truth as it is in Jesus. Not our thoughts but God’s thoughts are the truth. We have no business to think anything different from what God’s Word says. It is to direct our thoughts. And since Christ cannot be divided, and partly believed and partly rejected, but must be accepted as a whole, so we must not expect to find sanctification in accepting some things that are true, and rejecting others. He who is satisfied with anything less than the whole truth, will at last find himself with no truth at all. Like the Jews of old, who repeatedly turned away from God, many have turned away from the truth.

Monday: God Is Slow to Anger – Consider the story of Jonah and reflect on Jonah’s reaction to God’s compassionate forgiveness of the Ninevites, in Jonah 4:1-4. What does this tell us about Jonah, and about God? “When Jonah learned of God’s purpose to spare the city that, notwithstanding its wickedness, had been led to repent in sackcloth and ashes, he should have been the first to rejoice because of God’s amazing grace; but instead he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibility of his being regarded as a false prophet. Jealous of his reputation, he lost sight of the infinitely greater value of the souls in that wretched city. The compassion shown by God toward the repentant Ninevites “displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.” “Was not this my saying,” he inquired of the Lord, “when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest

Thee of the evil.” Jonah 4:1, 2.” {PK 271.1}. What was wrong with Jonah? Jonah had lost sight of the mission purpose. The blessing of the gospel preached to Abraham (Genesis 12), given to Israel, was for the whole world, even Nineveh. Jealous of his reputation, Jonah had lost sight of the mission. Thus, Jonah revealed a flawed mindset in uncomfortable confrontation with the Lord: “I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2). But Jonah is not alone in history of the Jews to have lost sight of the mission to bring gospel blessings to the entire world. It was not until Peter was commanded to go to Caesarea to preach the gospel to the Gentiles that he learnt this, and he exclaimed, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10: 34-35). This was the first time that Peter had ever perceived that truth, but it was not the first time that this thing was true. It had been a truth as long as God had existed. God never chose anybody to the exclusion of anybody else. The wisdom that comes from above is “without partiality” (James 3:17). In saving people of Nineveh, God taught Jonah the gospel blessings were for the entire world.

Tuesday: Righteous Indignation – What is righteous indignation and how do we avoid a call of judgment in human passion? The natural effect upon the doubting soul is to lead him to think, ‘I know that I am wicked, and therefore God is angry with me;’ and then will follow either a feeling of apathy, or else vain efforts to do something to appease the supposed anger of God. Thus, the purpose of the enemy of souls is accomplished. When we read the psalmist’s call for vengeance, let us recall that “God is love” (1 John 4:8); that He “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16); and that this was a sacrifice on the part of God Himself, because “the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). For example: “Arise, O Lord, in Thine anger; Lift up Thyself against the fury of mine adversaries; And awake for me the judgment Thou hast commanded. So shall the congregation of the peoples compass Thee about, And over it return Thou on high” (Psalm 7:6-7). Read in light of the first part of the psalm, this cry for vengeance does not seem so revengeful as it sometimes does to the careless reader. It is not demand of one man for vengeance upon other men who are hostile to him, but it is a call for judgment upon the archenemy. Moreover, it is inspired by the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:10-11), so that the element of human passion does not enter into it.

Wednesday: God Does Not Afflict Willingly – “Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men” (Psalm 90:3). This turning to dust seems death only if we forget “the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Hebrews 12:5-8). God wounds only to heal. “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:32-33).

Thursday: Show Compassion – Some worry that divine anger might unintentionally be taken as giving license to human vengeance; How do we guard against human vengeance? We read, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26). What is the meaning of this text? It gives us permission to be angry, provided we do not sin. Anger that is not sin is allowable, for nothing is forbidden except sin. ‘But how can we be angry without sinning?’ When we have a righteous indignation against sin, which springs from zeal for the glory of God, and not the common human anger prompted by self-love or self-pity. ‘But how can we know we have the right anger?’ The only safe course for us to pursue is to refrain from getting angry, until we are sure that we know how to be angry without sin. He who does this, will learn the meaning of the text as soon as it is necessary. ‘But what if we realise that our anger has been the sinful type?’ Then follow the latter part of the text: let not the sun go down upon your wrath – when you are tempted to self-justification and speak or act sinfully, do not go to sleep before making right that which bruised the soul. Further, as soon as you realise your sin, kneel and pray to God until you find rest in Christ.