

Sabbath School Lesson #8 – Free Will, Love, and Divine Providence – 15-21 Feb 2025

Christ said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The good cheer rests upon nothing we have done or can do, but upon what He has done. So, there is good cheer for the Christian all the time.

Sunday: Our Sovereign God – Read Psalm 81:11-14. How does this prove that man is a free moral agent and God gives man freedom? God always gives people just what they want. If they really want righteousness, He fills them with it, as it is written, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). But if they deliberately choose to do wrong, and hate the good, God gives them up to be “filled with all unrighteousness” (Romans 1:28-29). Of the twelve spies (Numbers 13-14), ten said they could not go up, and never did go up; two said they were able to possess the land, and did possess it. God will not force men into righteousness. If men wish to walk therein, He makes the way very plain. If they refuse, He allows them to exercise their own will. It is best for a man to walk in the way of the Lord. It is a terrible thing for a man to be given up to his own way. “Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of My counsel: they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (Proverbs 1:28-33).

Monday: Pantokrator – In Revelation 11:17, the Greek word *Pantokrator* is rendered “Almighty” which means “the all-ruling” – you could also say ‘all-powerful.’ Yet, as much as God is all-ruling and powerful, He created man as a free moral agent. Moreover, God knows everything (Acts 15:18; Psalm 139:1-2). But the fact that God knew the evil that men would do, even before the creation, does not make Him responsible for it, any more than the fact that a man can see by means of a telescope what a man is doing ten miles distant makes him responsible for that other one’s actions. God has from the beginning set before people warnings against sin and has provided them with all the necessary means for avoiding it; but He cannot interfere with man’s right and freedom of choice without depriving him of his manhood and making him the same as a stick. We are free to be saved or lost. The fruits of righteousness can only be rooted in a willing heart. Man is a living free moral agent; God will not work in man contrary to his will. God pleads with men to choose life, to be willing to do His will. “He that willeth to do His will shall know the doctrine” (John 7:17) – God will teach it to him by living it in him. Every word believed with the heart is a power to put the thing described in that word into life. All the time man is free; he must choose, he must will to do God’s will continually, and as he does thus place his will on the side of righteousness God’s powerful word of grace comes in. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). Every man holds the decision of his salvation in his own hands, but, thanks be to God, when the choice is on the side of life, the working out of that life is by the power of God.

Tuesday: To Love God – What do you say to those who question God creating us with free will? Freedom to do right implies freedom to do wrong. If a man were made so that he could not do wrong, he would have no freedom at all, not even to do right. He would be less than the brutes. There is no virtue in forced obedience, nor would there be any virtue in doing that which is right if it were impossible to do wrong. Moreover, there could be no pleasure or satisfaction in the professed friendship of two persons if one associated with the other just because he could not avoid it. The joy of the Lord in the companionship of His people is that they of their own free-will choose Him above all others. The very ones who rail against God for not preventing the ills that He foresees, would be the very first to charge Him with cruelty if He did arbitrarily interfere with their freedom and make them do that which they do not choose. Such a course would make everybody unhappy and discontented. The wisest thing for us to do is to stop trying to fathom the ways of the Almighty, and accept the fact that whatever the Lord does is right. “As for God, His way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30).

Wednesday: God's Ideal and Remedial Wills – We read about “being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Ephesians 1:11). There is a call to all: “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). “Whosoever will,” admits no exception. Christ died to deliver every man from sin to everlasting life. All this deliverance is “according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). The will of God is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God will that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). It is the love of God that whosoever believes in Christ should not perish (John 3:16). This love is extended to everyone. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). God has wrought out salvation for every man, and has given it to him; but the majority spurns it and throws it away. The judgment will reveal the fact that full salvation was given to every man and that the man lost deliberately has thrown away his birthright possession. God does know, and He foreknows. “Known unto God from the beginning are all his works” (Acts 15:18). Does “predestinated” mean God chooses who is saved and lost?

The foreknowledge of God does not mean He decides who is saved and lost. A man sits in his room, looking out over the country with a binocular. Away he sees a traveller crossing the plain. The traveller can see but a few rods before him, while the man with the binocular can see for miles ahead of him, and can note all the difficulties or pleasant places in the way. Now the fact that the man with a binocular sees what the traveller is coming to does not oblige the man to come to them. It has no effect upon him in any way whatever. Even so the foreknowledge of God does not affect the destiny of man. God knows the end of everything from the beginning, not because He studies it out, but because He is God. He inhabits eternity, and everything is present with Him. The thing a thousand years in the future is as much present with Him as a thing of today. Man by searching cannot understand God, and we are not called upon to explain all His acts; let us remember that, “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).

Thursday: Christ Has Overcome the World – Read John 16:33. Why should we rejoice because someone else has overcome the world, when it must also be overcome by us? The grand truth which answers this question is that we are not overcomers in ourselves, but overcomers in Christ. The apostle writes, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14). How is it that we are always caused to triumph in Christ? Simply because Christ has triumphed over everything, and in Him victory is ours. Christ was tempted in all points like as we are yet was without sin. He has met and overcome every obstacle that can possibly be brought against humanity in the struggle for the life to come. And whenever any of these things, “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” meet Him, they meet their Conqueror. The victory has been already won. And therefore, in Christ we have the victory; for when we are in Him, the temptations assail Him, and not ourselves. When we hide our weakness in His strength, there is only His strength to fight the battle. He has gained the victory, and the beaten foe can never recover from his defeat to hope for victory over Him. What, then, must we do to overcome? And why is it that we are so often overcome? The obvious answer is that we cannot overcome outside of Christ. What we must do is to take the victory that has been already won, the victory that has been gained by Him. He overcame for us, that He might bestow His triumph upon us. And we take the victory by faith, for it is by faith that Christ comes into our hearts. This is what is meant by the apostle John, when he says, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). By faith we bring Christ into our hearts and lives (Ephesians 3:17). And Christ being there, He is there as the Conqueror of all that is to be met and overcome in the Christian warfare. The glorious truth is thus made manifest, that the victory over every temptation and difficulty is already ours, in Christ. We need not, therefore, come up to the conflict with a faint heart, but with all confidence, knowing that defeat cannot possibly be the outcome, no matter how formidable the foe may make himself appear. The battle is already fought, and Jesus Christ holds out to us the victory. We have simply to take that victory, and say, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).