

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Honesty With God – 10–16 February 2018

Christ would have us know that no circumstances could justify some dishonesty. “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). Our Lesson study this week is taken from: Luke 16:10, Lev. 27:30, Gen. 22:1-12, Heb. 12:2, Luke 11:42, Heb. 7:2-10, Nehemiah 13.

Sunday: A Matter of Simple Honesty – This phrase comes from the writings of Ellen White, in which we read: “He who gives men power to get wealth has with the gift bound up an obligation. Of all that we acquire He claims a specified portion. The tithe is the Lord’s. ‘All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree,’ ‘the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, ... shall be holy unto the Lord’ (Leviticus 27:30, 32). The pledge made by Jacob at Bethel shows the extent of the obligation. ‘Of all that Thou shalt give me,’ he said, ‘I will surely give the tenth unto Thee’ (Genesis 28:22)” {Ed 138.3}. “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse” (Malachi 3:10), is God’s command. No appeal is made to gratitude or to generosity. This is a matter of simple honesty. The tithe is the Lord’s; and He bids us return to Him that which is His own” {Ed 138.4}.

In British law, “a person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it” (s1 Theft Act 1968). Why is it that people steal? It is because they think that they have not enough, and they cannot trust God to supply their needs. Some do not know the Lord, and they suppose that they are obliged to look out for themselves. Others who profess to know the Lord, lose their supposed trust as soon as they see difficulty. Therefore we see that the basis of what is generally recognised as stealing is identical with all distrust of God. There are many who do not pay tithe, because they have never realised that it was a duty. “Will a man rob God?” (Malachi 3:8). Many do, who have never robbed their fellow-men, and who have a reputation for honesty. The Lord says that the tenth belongs to Him. Then He ought to have it. But if I keep it and use it, knowing what the Bible says about it, how can my neighbour have confidence enough in me to trust me with what belongs to him? If a man will rob God, will he not rob his fellow-man? Dare anyone trust such an one? Yes; because there is a law against theft, and the man who steals from his neighbour is not only punished, but he loses credit and reputation. The Lord does not demand His own immediately; He does not call for a settlement every month and every year; so in our blind selfishness we take liberties with Him, persuading ourselves that He does not see nor care (Psalms 94:7). As nobody knows whether we pay tithe or not, we do not lose standing with men; or we may get the credit of paying tithe by paying a fragment of it, and calling it the tithe. That is, we are honest for appearance sake, and because of fear of the law. Let us ask, is our supposed honesty only a sham, an outside show, and are we honest only because there is danger of being found out and punished if we have acted so?

The Apostle Paul bears witness to the great liberality of the churches of Macedonia, in spite of their “great trial of affliction,” and “their deep poverty.” He did not need to plead with them to make an offering to the cause of God, but says, “For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift.” The reason for this is that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). This is the secret of all honesty; for whoever is honest with the Lord will never defraud any man. Not simply our property, but we ourselves belong to the Lord, and we are to render to Him His own. When we recognise that we are not our own, but that our whole being belongs to Him, we shall also recognise that we can have no property in our own right. Strength is more than money; and the commandment “Thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:15) forbids our robbing God of the strength that is His due. If I wantonly destroy my neighbour’s property it is the same as though I steal his goods. All our members belong to the Lord, as instruments of righteousness. If we misuse them in any way, making them serve our own personal gratification, we are guilty of theft. We owe to the Lord, not merely all the strength we may have at this present moment, but all that we might have if we lived according to the law of life in Christ Jesus. And here we see again that the commandment is life everlasting. All God’s requirements are really statements of His promises. He asks nothing from us that He does not first give to us; and in making for it of us He does not ask that we give it to Him, in the sense that we ourselves are deprived of it, but that we always have it in possession to render to Him. So the commandment “Thou shalt not steal” requiring us to give all the strength of our soul and body to the Lord, means that if we heed His word He will see that we have perfect strength to give to Him. His commandments are not grievous, but on the contrary they assure us all blessings. Everything grows with use, so as we keep the commandment, yielding to God all the strength which His own everlasting power works in us, we shall go from strength to strength, until at last we appear in Zion, until in strength we appear before God (Psalms 84:7).

Monday: The Life of Faith – The life of faith has to do with our flesh, our body. Read the words of the Apostle Paul: “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). Read again: “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13). Again: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). Still further: “Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

It is plain upon the face of the last scripture quoted, that the Christian is to give his body the same kind of discipline that the athlete does when he is in training for a race, only from a far higher motive. Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things; very good; but while they do it for a corruptible crown, we do it for an incorruptible crown. What is it that we do? Why, we are temperate in all things, keeping our body under, and bringing it into subjection, disciplining it, is so that it will obey the mind of the Spirit of God. Our bodies are the temples of God, and are to be under the direct control of the Spirit of God. God Himself is to quicken our mortal bodies by His indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:11). The Spirit of God (and also of Christ) (Romans 8:9) is to supply all the life that we have. The life of Christ is to be manifested in our mortal flesh. This means health, for we read: “My son, attend to My words; incline thine ear to My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and *health to all their flesh*” (Proverbs 4:20-22). Nothing is plainer in the Bible than that when a man is really converted he becomes “another man,” “a new creature.” He has the same flesh as before, and the same general outward appearance, nevertheless he is “not in the flesh, but in the Spirit” (Romans 8:9). The life of Christ is thenceforth to be manifested in his mortal flesh, so that it is no longer he that lives, but Christ living in him. Christ takes possession of his body, and there is the incarnation as truly as when Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. The mystery is enacted, of a man in the flesh living a wholly spiritual life. This he does, not by any power residing in the flesh, not by any power known to the world, but by the power of the Spirit of Christ. His life is a life of faith.

Tuesday: A Statement of Faith – We may show our lack of faith by neglecting to render to God His dues. Among nearly all denominations the tithing system is recognised as the Bible plan of supporting those who labour in the cause of God. It is founded on the same principle as the Sabbath – the right of property. “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord;” and whoever uses that time for himself takes that to which he has no right. So also “the tithe is the Lord’s,” and whoever does not return it to Him is guilty of robbery. Men who would scorn to defraud their neighbours of a penny, will systematically rob God, and think there is no wrong done. The Bible bears no uncertain testimony on this point. In astonishment the prophet says, by direct inspiration from God, “Will a man rob God?” Some one will say, No; a man cannot rob God. But listen: “Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and in offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation” (Malachi 3:8-9). The neglect to honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase (Proverbs 3:9), is a most flagrant manifestation of unbelief. God makes His care for us, both temporal and spiritual, dependent on our remembering Him; but if we do not thus honour Him, we intimate that we have no faith in His ability or willingness to care for us, or else that we lightly esteemed His protection.

Wednesday: Honest Tithe: Holy to the Lord – Besides the tithe, God has kept for Himself one of the seven days of the week. This – the Sabbath – He calls “My holy day.” Then if we use this day for our own work or pleasure, are we not robbing God of His holy time? But God says to us, “Thou shalt not steal,” and His Word is Spirit and life, able to fulfil itself, and to keep us from doing anything that He tells us not to do. So when He says, “Thou shalt not steal,” there is the same power in that Word as when He said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. His precious Word of power will keep out of our hearts every seed of the evil weeds of dishonesty, and fill them with the sweet, fresh flowers of honesty and perfect truth. “In like manner a tithe of our income is ‘holy unto the Lord.’ The New Testament does not reenact the law of the tithe, as it does not that of the Sabbath; for the validity of both is assumed, and their deep spiritual import explained” {CS 66.3}.

Thursday: Revival, Reformation, and Tithing – “Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from the spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices” {CS 42.2}.