

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – The Habits of a Steward – 17–23 March 2018

Christ would have us know that we shall be individually, for time and eternity, what our habits make us; let us therefore allow Him to mold us. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Psalms 119:9-11). Our Lesson study this week is from: Ephesians 5:15-17, Colossians 3:23, Luke 12:35-48, James 4:14, Acts 3:21, and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

Sunday: Habit: Seek God First – Of all our examples in seeking the Lord first, none is of course a better one than the example of Jesus – being at His Father’s Business. When Joseph and Mary, after three days of searching, found Jesus in the temple, “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions,” and reproved Him for not being with them, He replied, “Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:46-49). What was He doing? He was not teaching, not disputing, for to attempt either would have been most unseemly in a child of twelve; but He was simply listening to the teaching of the doctors of the law, and asking them questions in order to get a more perfect understanding. He was, in short, endeavouring to increase in the knowledge of God; and this was the doing of His Father’s business. The one thing required of God’s children is to know Him. The real business of life is to learn to know God. It is for this that God has placed us here. Are we attending strictly to business, or are we idling away our time in other things that we make ourselves think are more important? God is to come first in all our considerations; we are to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

Monday: Habit: Look for the Return of Jesus – The Lord gives the evidence in the Word by which we may know when His coming is near at hand, even at the door. Yet many are asleep and would not be ready unless we warn them. Let us give the warning message to the world to prepare souls for the coming of the Lord. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man” (Matthew 14:36). Yet in these last days some men are continually guessing and speculating and making calculations about periods and cycles in the effort to fix the date for the Lord’s coming. Now, this much we know, “The Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luke 12:40). When men, therefore, have made their last guess, we may know that at that hour at least the Lord will not come. His coming will take all unawares who are not following His instructions. The knowledge of the exact time of His coming would not prepare a soul for that day. Now, “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding; that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching” (Luke 12:35-37).

In the coming of the Lord is found the consummation of the hope of every believer in Christ. Then will be “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” The promise to Abraham was “that he should be the heir of the world,” but “by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,” and God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on.” “These [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declared plainly that they seek a country, ... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:13-16). And if we are Christ’s, then are we Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29). For our citizenship is in heaven, wherefore a Saviour we are ardently awaiting, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

Tuesday: Habit: Use Time Wisely – The opportunity to be true to God comes every day to every one. What we must learn is to make use of it. “Redeeming the time,” is what we are told to be doing in Ephesians 5:16. 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 portion-less. 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; we have not been the gainers. With time wasted, we cannot now render unto Him the service that we ought to or 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). Rejoiced that we are even now willing to serve Him, He spends no time in reproaches, but renews His gifts to us as freely as though we had never been wayward, rebellious spendthrifts. "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

Wednesday: Habit: Keep a Healthy Mind, Body, and Soul – The Lesson writer states that, "good health habits, such as exercise and proper diet, indicate that we care about ourselves." But for us, Seventh-day Adventists, it is more than caring for ourselves – God has appointed our proper diet as purely plant based. For many years now, as evidence has piled up indicating flesh as a factor in many diseases, more and more non-Adventists are turning to a plant based diet. Incredibly, the many flesh-eating Seventh-day Adventists are the hardest to impress. In the face of many books of divine warnings, thousands of Adventists continue to eat the flesh of animals. God is very clear:

"God is trying to lead us back, step by step, to His original design – that man should subsist upon the natural products of the earth. Among those who are waiting for the coming of the Lord meat eating will eventually be done away; flesh will cease to form a part of their diet" {CH 450.1}.

"There are those who ought to be awake to the danger of meat eating who are still eating the flesh of animals, thus endangering the physical, mental, and spiritual health. Many who are now only half converted on the question of meat eating will go from God's people, to walk no more with them" {RH, 27 May 1902}. "A diet of flesh meat tends to develop animalism. A development of animalism lessens spirituality, rendering the mind incapable of understanding truth" {RH, 27 May 1902}. "Who among our brethren will sign a pledge to dispense with flesh meats, tea, coffee, and all injurious foods and become health reformers in the truest sense of the term?" {SpM 427.6}.

"The liability to take disease is increased tenfold by meat eating. The intellectual, the moral, and the physical powers are depreciated by the habitual use of flesh meats. Meat eating deranges the system, beclouds the intellect, and blunts the moral sensibilities;" "Far better give up the name of Christian than make a profession and at the same time indulge appetites which strengthen unholy passions" {CH 70.2; 579.1}. "Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs. The eating of flesh is unnatural. We are to return to God's original purpose in the creation of man" {CD 380.2}.

Thursday: Habit: Self-Discipline – Self-discipline is self-denial. Jesus said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). This denial means vastly more than merely abstaining from that which the world recognises as sin – it means the giving up of legitimate comforts and enjoyments for the good of others; and following the Saviour means much more than simply not doing evil – it means doing good. It is walking even as Christ walked; and his life was one not of self-pleasing, but of self-denial for the salvation of others. He left the courts of Heaven and even laid down His life for us; and can we hope to truly be His disciples while selfishly enjoying all that we can of this world, and planning only, like the men of the world (Psalms 17:14), to leave the rest of our substance to our children? While we cannot say that a people's spirituality is always measured by their generosity, it is certainly true that their spirituality never rises *above* their generosity; always remember, the gift is measured not by its money value, but, as in the case of the poor widow (Luke 21:2-4) by the motive which prompts the gift. Those who give most from a sincere desire to advance the cause of truth, are blest most; not because the gift of God can be purchased with money, but having given their means they will also offer prayers.

Self-discipline helps to avoid self-indulgence in appetite. It is the conviction that their case is hopeless that prevents men from rising out of the degradation of self-indulgence. The man who feels the appetite asserting itself in him and clamouring for gratification, realises that the resistance which he purposed making against the temptation is gradually melting away, and feels that it is impossible to struggle against his own nature. But if, in that hour, he can know that there is a power with him which is stronger than the appetite, and that, ceasing to struggle, he has but to call for help upon One who is mighty, the knowledge will beget in him the confidence that brings victory. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Jesus Christ has come in every man's flesh, and for this reason, nothing is impossible to the man who knows it. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," and "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:3-4). The knowledge that Christ, with all power, dwells in him, will give a man victory over perverted appetite. No man can be successful temperance worker who cannot bear testimony to this fact, for there is no other way of salvation given among men.