

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – The Reading of the Word – 2-8 November 2019

Christ would have us read the word and understand the reading. In the days of Ezra, it is said, “They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8). How is it with us, do we read the word and understand the reading? Let us consider how we ought to read the word.

What will result in our reading the word? Peter’s exhortation is, “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). It is a great mistake for people to suppose that the text means to be able to repeat a creed, or to quote Scripture texts to substantiate dogmas. A formula of doctrine is not a hope. Hope is living; it is a real thing, “Christ in you” is the only “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Therefore to be able to give to every man a reason of the hope that is in us, is to be able to make plain to him the Divine presence. This is further evident from the fact that the ability to give a reason for the hope in us comes from having God sanctified, and enthroned, in the heart.

One problem professed Christians have with reading the word, they do not let it work in them, they instead attempt the impossibility of working the word of God in themselves.

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31). How many have read these words and have thought, ‘Oh, that it might be so!’ and how earnestly they have tried to put away that evil speaking, together with “the root of bitterness” whence it springs, and have failed, because “the tongue can no man tame, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). The same trouble has been found with the similar exhortation, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6). O, yes, if we only could; but how often have we resolved that we would not be betrayed into hasty speech, and have almost immediately been covered with shame because of the foolish things that issued from our mouth ‘before we thought’! Again we read the divine exhortation, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3, 5). And similar to this is the exhortation, “Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1). What a blessing or heaven there would be on earth if such a state of things only existed, even among those who profess the name of Christ! Yet how many who have set this blessed ideal before themselves, find themselves wondering how it is to be attained!

It is the man who is “carnal, sold under sin,” who is obliged to say, “To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18). God is just and kind. He is not a tyrant, and He does not set tasks before His people without showing them the way to perform them. He not only shows the way, but supplies the power, the trouble is with our reading of His commands and exhortations. Let us read one more and see if that does not begin to suggest the way out of the difficulty: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). Surely we cannot control the peace of God. We cannot manufacture it, and put it within our hearts. No, only God can supply peace, and this He has already done. Jesus, the Son of God, said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you” (John 14:27). “I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints” (Psalms 85:8). The fact that only the Lord can put His grace into the heart, and cause it to rule there, should indicate to us that it is He who is to fulfill those other exhortations in us. It is not us to work the word of God, rather allow and give free reign the word of God to work righteous in us.

Once more we read, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). This, together with the text quoted just before, tells us the whole secret. It is by the word of God that these things are to be done. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). The word of the Lord, which sets before us these desirable attainments of thought and speech, is the agency by which they are supplied.

What can the word of the Lord do? – Read Psalm 33:6, 9: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” “And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25). The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every

one that believeth; and the power of God is seen in creation (Romans 1:16, 19-20). It is therefore the power by which the commands and exhortations of the Spirit of God are to be fulfilled in us is the power by which the heavens and the earth were made. Turn then to the simple story of creation. God said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Again, God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so" (verse 9). Again, God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so" (verse 11). Once more: "God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so" (verses 14-15). And thus we read throughout the entire story of creation. The darkness had no power in itself to bring forth light. The waters could not gather themselves together into one place. The earth could not make a mighty exertion, and send forth the trees laden with fruit. Much less could the sun, moon, and stars create themselves. That which was not, could not bring itself into existence. At the word of God, "Let it be," everything came into being. The words, "Let there be" carried with them the power of being. The thing required was in the words requiring its production.

Now "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). And "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). We are to remember that the exhortations that we read at first are not the exhortations of a man, but that they are the words of God to us. The same One who in the beginning said, "Let there be light," and, "Let the earth bring forth grass," says to us, "Let all bitterness, and wrath . . . be put away from you." Just as the first was done, so must the other be accomplished. "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isaiah 61:11). Therefore when we read the exhortations to let certain evil things be put away from us, and to let certain graces appear, we are not to regard them as commands for us to put them away, but as the agency by which the task is to be accomplished in us.

God's power to create is as great now as it ever was. He who in the beginning caused the ground to bring forth fruit, and who made a perfect man of the dust of the ground, can take these earthen vessels and make them "to the praise of the glory of His grace." We are to become so familiar with the fact that God is Creator, that when He says, "Let this be done," we shall at once and continually respond, 'Amen; even so, let it be done, Lord Jesus;' and thus the new heart will be created, from which will proceed thoughts acceptable in His sight.

Now read more: "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psalm 17:4). In Revelation 12:11, there speaking of the casting down of the "accuser of our brethren," the heavenly voice says: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." This does not mean the word of their testimony in meeting, but the word of the testimony in which the psalmist found so great delight. They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of God. But this cannot be done except by those who have the word of God abiding in them. If the word be in the heart, the Spirit of Christ will, in hour of temptation, bring to remembrance that portion that will foil the tempter.

Every Christian can testify as to the power of the word at such times. When inclined to congratulate himself on some real or fancied superior attainment, what a powerful check are the words, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Or when harsh and bitter thoughts are struggling within him for control, what power to quell those turbulent emotions lies in the words, "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Now whence comes this power? The answer is found in the words of Christ: "The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." What spirit are they? In 1 Peter 1:10-11, speaking of the prophets, says that it was the Spirit of Christ that was in them. The power of the Spirit that dwells in the word is Christ Himself, for Christ is the divine Word.