

Sabbath School Lesson #14 – Boasting in the Cross – 23-29 September 2017

Christ would have us glory only in Him. Thus Paul says, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). Read Galatians 6:11-18 for our study. We come to the end of our study in the book of Galatians. The importance of the Epistle, not less to us than to those to whom it was first addressed, appears in every chapter. The consuming zeal of the apostle Paul in writing it is seen in the fact that, contrary to his usual custom, he seized the pen and wrote the Epistle with his own hand (6:11). As intimated in chapter 4, the apostle suffered from weak eyes, which hindered him much in his work, or would have hindered him but for the power of God resting on him; so that it was necessary for him always to have some one with him, to minister unto him, and to serve as amanuensis. From 2 Thessalonians 2:2 we learn that some took advantage of this fact to write letters to the churches in Paul’s name, which troubled the brethren; but in the close of that Epistle (3:16-18) Paul indicated to them how they might know an epistle that came from him. No matter who helped, he wrote the salutation and the signature with his own hand. So great was the urgency in this case, however, that he wrote the entire epistle of Galatians himself.

True and False Circumcision – In Galatians 6:12 it is evident that the circumcision which was being taught to the brethren, as recorded in the second chapter, and warned them against so strongly in chapter 5, was mere outward circumcision in the flesh. That stood merely for outward righteousness, the works of the flesh. The true circumcision was and is to “worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). True circumcision is the keeping of the law, which can be done only as the Spirit of God writes the law in the heart (Romans 8:25-29; Hebrews 8:10). The man who had circumcision in the flesh merely, but did not keep the law, was reckoned by the Lord as uncircumcised. Such ones gloried or boasted in the flesh, and denied the cross of Christ, which is the only thing in the world in which one may rightly glory. The true circumcision is crucifixion with Christ; for that is, as seen from Galatians 6:14, “the world has been crucified to me” – is a complete cutting off from “this present evil world.”

God Revealed in the Cross – “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jeremiah wrote, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches” (Jeremiah 9:23). Why should not the wise man glory in his wisdom? – Because, so far as it is his own wisdom, it is foolishness. “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain” (1 Corinthians 3:10, 20). No man has any wisdom in which to glory, for his own wisdom is foolishness, and wisdom which God gives is something to cause humility instead of self-glory.

What about might? “All flesh is grass” (Isaiah 40:6). “Every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psalm 39:5). “Men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.” But “power belongeth unto God” (Psalm 62:9, 11). As to riches, they are “uncertain” (1 Timothy 6:17). Man “heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.” “Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:5). Only in Christ are found unsearchable and abiding riches. Man therefore has absolutely nothing in which to boast, for what is there left of a man when he has nothing that can be called wealth, no wisdom whatever, and absolutely no strength? Everything that man is or has comes from the Lord. Therefore the Lord says in Jeremiah 9:24: “Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight.” Now put this text with Galatians 6:14. The same Spirit inspired them both, so that there is no contradiction. Jeremiah says that we are to glory only in the knowledge of the Lord; and the apostle Paul says that there is nothing in which to glory save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The conclusion therefore is that in the cross we find the knowledge of God. To know God is eternal life, and there is no life for mankind except through the cross of Christ. We see most clearly that all that may be known of God is revealed in the cross. Aside from the cross, there is no knowledge of God.

The Cross Crucifies – The cross in which we are to glory is the cross of Christ, the cross on which Christ suffered crucifixion. To Him it meant crucifixion, and so it does to us, for by it the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world. It meant humiliation and disgrace, yet nevertheless it is something in which to glory, because the disgrace is only that which the world regards as disgrace. Since the friendship of this world is enmity against God, it follows that the hatred of the world is friendship with God; and the friendship of God is something in which to rejoice. The cross

of Christ, in which alone there is glory, separates us from the world. By the cross of Jesus the world is to us as though it did not exist. If the world is crucified to us, and we to the world, then, although in the world, we are no longer of the world. The cross means death and disgrace as far as the world is concerned. That which is contrary to the world, and to all the calculations of the world, and which the world despises and turns from, is that in which the child of God is to glory.

The Cross Elevates – Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.” This He said signifying what death He should die, namely, the death of the cross. He humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross; “wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:8-9). He descended “first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:9-10). It was through death that He ascended to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. It was the cross that lifted Him up from earth to heaven. Hence it is the cross alone that brings us glory, and so it is the only thing in which to glory.

The Cross Creates – Paul said, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” That is, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any power. The only thing that is of any value is: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17); through death we become joined to Him (Romans 6:3). The cross makes a new creation – a reason for glorying in it; for when the new creation came from the hand of God in the beginning, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

The Cross Seen in Creation – The preaching of the cross is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Thus the cross of Christ is the Gospel (Romans 1:16). But the power of God is seen only in the things that are made (Romans 1:20). It is in the things that are made that we learn that which may be known of God, “His eternal power and divinity.” Now since the cross is the power of God, it follows that the cross is revealed in the things that are made. Although the curse, death, has come upon all the earth, we nevertheless see life all about us. How can that be? Christ is ever present to give us life. Christ sustains our lives, and wherever He is, there is the cross; for Christ is not known to mankind except as the Crucified One.

The Glory – We have seen that the cross is the power of God, and that the power of God is seen in the things that He has made, so that the cross is everywhere visible in creation. It is by the cross that everything is sustained. But for the cross, there would be universal death. Not a man could breathe, not a plant could grow, not a ray of light could shine from heaven, if it were not for the cross. Now “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). They are some of the things that God has made. No pen can describe and no artist’s brush can depict the wondrous glory of the heavens; yet that glory is but the glory of the cross of Christ. This follows from the facts already learned, that the power of God is seen in the things that are made, and that the cross is the power of God. The glory of God is His power, for “the exceeding greatness of His power to usward” is seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20), and “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Romans 6:4). It was for the suffering of death that Jesus was crowned with glory and honour (Hebrews 2:9). So we see that all the glory that the saints will ever share with Christ, is nothing more than the glory of the cross. Surely there is enough glory in the cross to satisfy anybody.

The Marks of Christ – “From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” The marks of the cross were upon Paul. He had been crucified with Christ, and he carried the nail-prints. They were branded on his body. They marked him as the bond-servant, the slave, of the Lord Jesus. Let no one, then, interfere with him; he was not the servant of men. He owed allegiance to Christ alone, who had bought him. Let no one seek to get him to serve man or the flesh, because Jesus had branded him with His mark, and he could serve no other. Moreover, let men beware how they sought to interfere with his liberty in Christ, or how they treated him, for his Master would surely protect His own. Ah, what glory there is in the cross! All the glory of heaven is in that despised thing. Not in the figure of the cross, but in the cross itself. The world does not reckon it glory, but then it did not know the Son of God, and it does not know His Spirit, because it cannot see Him. May God open our eyes to see the glory, so that we may reckon things at their true value. May we consent to be crucified with Christ, that the cross may glorify us. In the cross of Christ there is salvation. In it is the power of God to keep us from falling, for it lifts us up from earth to heaven. In the cross there is the new creation, which God Himself pronounces “very good.” God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!