

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – Families of Faith – 8-14 June 2019

Christ would have us avoid worldly culture but be of faith as Abraham and others that we read about in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Thus the apostle's admonition is: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2). Two aspects of this text:

What does the word "witnesses" in this text mean? The twelves of Hebrews continues on the argument on faith, and the cloud or multitude of witnesses who are here spoken of are the worthies whose deeds are recorded in the eleventh chapter. They are not "witnesses" in the sense that they are *looking on* to see us run the race, for most of them mentioned died. Now of the dead it is said that "they know not anything" (Ecclesiastes 9:5); that in the day of their death their "thoughts perish" (Psalms 146:4); and that they are not conscious of the elevation or disgrace of even their dearest relatives (Job 14:21). It is certain, then, that those of whom the apostle says that they "all died in faith" (Hebrews 11:13), are not cognisant of anything that is now taking place on this earth. How then are they "witnesses"? They have all run the race, and obtained great victories through faith; and by means of the sacred record their lives bear witness to the power of a firm, abiding faith. Of Abel it is said that "he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4). So likewise all these worthies are standing by to cheer us on by their recorded testimony as to the possibility of making the race a success.

What "joy" was set before Jesus? Christ, the Son of God, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, was to who all the hosts of angels, whom He had created (Colossians 1:16) bowed in adoration. His glory was the glory of the Father (John 17:5). Not a thing was there to mar the perfect peace of heaven, and nothing more could have been conceived to add to the perfect enjoyment of all its inhabitants. But when Christ looked upon men on earth "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, all this glory seemed to fade away. He did not count it as a thing at all to be desired, so long as men were perishing before His eyes without help. He divested Himself of all His glory, and submitted to degradation and death, in order that He might win a greater "joy that was set before Him." Yes, even the joy of heaven could be increased, and that by removing the Joy of Heaven to earth, that earth's misery might be turned to joy. Who can estimate the depth of love that could count the immeasurable bliss of heaven as nothing compared with the joy of bringing, through reproach, ignominy and death, fallen men to share it with Christ? And this is the goodness of God toward men. Ought it not to lead them to repentance? Yea, verily; such will be its effect upon everyone who will but steadfastly look at it. Oh that men would indeed look to Jesus always continually! Of such a look could it with truth be said, 'There's life in a look.'

Sunday: "Hold Fast What Is Good" – "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). A very reasonable exhortation this, and one that should commend itself to everybody's good sense; yet few heed it, and many of those who profess to regard it misapply it. How are we to prove all things? By what standard shall we test them? Here is where so many fail. Most people will use their own feelings and impulses as the standard. Their natural likes and dislikes determine what they shall hold fast and what they will reject. What they think to be good, they will follow; but since human judgment is naturally controlled or at least biased by inclination and desire, it is an unsafe guide. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 16:25). For this reason alone, if for no other, it should be apparent to all that we are not to prove all things by sampling them. A thing may taste good, and yet contain a deadly poison. He who makes it his practice to eat everything he sees, in order to find out if it is good to eat, may have his probation cut short. It is far better to apply well-known tests for poisons, and then to eat only that which is proved to be good. Just as there are tests for physical poisons, which can be applied without subjecting ourselves to the influence of those poisons, so we have an infallible test of truth and error. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according

to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). The Word of God is truth, and whatever is not in harmony with that is of course error. If we become thoroughly familiar with the Word, error will be revealed on its first approach, and we need have nothing to do with it. So every cultural influence must be proved against this standard. But we must not supposed that we are to prove the Word of God itself, to see whether or not we should hold to it, or to how much we should hold fast. No; that is the standard that is already proved. "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalms 12:6). "Every word of God is pure" (Proverbs 30:5). The Word itself is good; hold it fast, and prove all things by it, holding only that which the Word declares to be good.

Monday: The Power of Culture on Family – Let us not copy worldly culture but follow that of Abraham. God said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19). Note the words, "He will command his children and his household after him, *and they shall keep the way of the Lord*, to do justice and judgment." He would not simply command them to do it, and there let the matter rest; but He would command them, and the result would be that they would keep the way of the Lord. His teaching would be effective. We may be sure that the commands of Abraham to his children and his household were not harsh and arbitrary. We shall understand them better if we consider the nature of the commandments of God. They "are not grievous" (1 John 5:3); "His commandment is life everlasting" (John 12:50). A father who thinks to follow the example of Abraham in commanding his family, by harsh, arbitrary rules, and by acting the part of a stern judge, or a tyrant, making threats of what he will do if his commands are not obeyed, and enforcing his commands, not in the spirit of love, because they are right, but because he is stronger than his children, and has them in his power, has much need to learn of the God of Abraham. "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nature and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). At the same time we may be sure that the commands of Abraham were not like Eli's, weak and querulous reproofs to his wicked and worthless sons: "Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear" (1 Samuel 2:23-24). On the other hand, Abraham transmitted a blessing to all eternity, because the commands which he gave to his children had restraining power.

Tuesday: Sustaining Families Through Seasons of Change – Hadassah (Esther 2:7-9) is one example of sustaining faith amid change. Hadassah, known as Esther, was an orphan of the house of Saul, whose parents had been among the royal captives in the days of king Nebuchadnezzar. She had lived always with a cousin by the name of Mordecai, who treated her as his own daughter. Little did Mordecai and his wife think, when they took the helpless infant Hadassah, that she would one day stand for her people in the presence of the king Ahasuerus. She was an obedient child, and consequently became an obedient woman. was simple-hearted and unassuming, requiring little and demanding nothing. She loved her own people, although to be true to them meant that she must risk looking death in the face. She was faithful to what her uncle had taught her, and she sustain that family faith amid change.

Wednesday: Toward a First-Generation Faith – The crisis of faith that developed in Israel after Joshua and his peers died (Judges 2:7-13), is today mirrored in our Seventh-day Adventist Church after Ellen White and her peers died. After Joshua and the Elders died, there arose a new generation worshipping Baalim. We are "repeating the history of that people" (EG White, 5T 160.2). In the days of Ellen White and the pioneers, Seventh-day Adventists rejected the trinity doctrine. Our new generation has forgotten "what it cost [pioneers] to search for the truth as for hidden treasure, [and how pioneers] labored to lay the foundation of our work" (CW 28.1), and have we since brought in a reformation consisting of "giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith [accounting as error] the fundamental principles that have sustained the work" (see 1SM pp. 204-205).

Thursday: Twenty-First-Century Runners – Like the disciples of Jesus, our church must be runners proclaiming to the world that Christ is risen. But she cannot do it without the power. And the power to do it lies solely in having the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9) come upon us as was upon the disciples. May Christ breath His holy Spirit in us (John 20:22).