

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Worship the Creator – 3-9 August 2019

Christ through Isaiah asks us these heart-searching questions: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” (58:6-7).

Sunday: Idolatry and Oppression – The worshiping of the golden calf by the Israelites in Exodus 32 represents the form of heathen worship which has drawn men from the worship of the true God. The calf was a representation of the sacred bull called Apis, which the Egyptians worshiped, and with which the Jews had necessarily become very familiar in their long sojourn in Egypt. Apis was considered as the visible manifestation of Osiris, which was identified with the sun or sun-worship. Thus, the worship which the Israelites paid to the golden calf was really the Egyptian form of sun-worship – that form of idolatry which has always stood foremost as the antagonist of the true worship of God. It is indeed significant that just at the time when God manifested Himself to the Israelites in a peculiar manner, and made known to them His Sabbath, they should have fallen back into the old sun-worship, whose chief festival day – Sunday, the first day of the week – has always contended for supremacy with the day specially distinctive of the worship of the true God. The sun-god, Osiris or Apis, was the patron god of the Egyptian kings, and stood for Egypt. So the worship of the calf signified that the Israelites, forgetful of the covenant that they had made with God, were sinking back to the level of Egyptian life. It was the very worst manifestation of the spirit which led them so often to long for the flesh-pots of Egypt. It is significant of the sensuality to which people naturally sink when they turn aside from the worship of one the true God – the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – who can be worshiped only in the beauty of holiness.

But we have not yet learned the full extent of the sin of the Israelites in the worship of the calf. The worship of Apis was accompanied with the grossest licentiousness, such as the dancing of nude women, as is indicated by the ceremonies attendant upon the inauguration of a new Apis. Thus the prohibitions recorded in Exodus 22:19 and Leviticus 18:23; 20:16.

The Scripture record indicates that the calf worship by the Israelites on this occasion was accompanied with all the license usual in heathen worship. We read: “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (Exodus 32:6). The Hebrew word rendered “to play,” signifies playing with leaping, singing, and dancing. This dancing, especially among the Egyptians, was sensual and indecent. The word rendered “corrupted,” in the next verse, where it is said, “Thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves,” is the same that is used in Genesis 6:1-12, where we read that the earth was corrupt, “for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” This explains the terrible anger of the Lord, and why He desired to consume the people at once. We note that the golden calf was later ground into powder. The grinding of the calf to powder was a fitting emblem of the weakness of all that are called gods, when brought before the God of Heaven and earth.

Monday: A Reason to Worship – To worship aright requires undivided service to God. God requires that all the faculties both of body and mind shall be consecrated to Him; He will accept nothing less. We are to regard ourselves and all our talents, both of mind and means, as belonging to Him without reserve. It is a rare thing to find one who realises the full extent of the claims that God makes upon us. Our minds have been so warped by selfishness that it is difficult to even conceive of such perfect service as the law requires, and much more so to do it. It should be the great object of every person to have his spiritual discernment so quickened that he may be able to comprehend the completeness of service that God requires of him. It could not be any more forcibly stated than it is in Luke 10:25-28.

But it should be borne in mind that God does not make this claim upon us arbitrarily, and without sufficient reason. He claims no more than is his just due. The basis of God’s claim upon His creatures as follows: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). It is because God has created us that He has a right to our worship. This

fact is made very prominent in the Bible. Why should we serve Jehovah, rather than the gods which the heathen worship? Because God created us and all things that we enjoy, and they did not. Paul says: "There be gods many and lords many, but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we are in Him" (1 Corinthians 8:5-6). The psalmist says: "Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalms 100:2-3). If we had made ourselves, or could by our own aided efforts maintain our existence for a single moment, we would be under no obligation to any being; but since we are indebted to God not only for life, but for all that is necessary for its continuance, common gratitude requires us to render Him all the service of which we are capable, for it is impossible for us to do as much for Him as He is done for us.

Tuesday: Religious Oppressors – The principle which rules in the world is selfishness. This it is which causes the distress and the evil under which the earth is growing. Each one is spent on his own advantage, without reference to the interests of others. Not only so, but the world is full of men, many of them rich and powerful, who not only disregard the interests, but also the rights, of their fellow-men. The powerful dictate to the weak; the rich oppress the poor. The fortunate extort from their less fortunate fellows all that opportunity offers, regardless of the misery which they may thereby inflict upon them. This is what we see all over the world today. We see the rule of the principle of self. By it men are divided into two opposing classes, and the conflict between them rages with ever-increasing violence. And so it must be as long as self continues to rule. It is a question of the survival of the strongest. The principle of the gospel of Christ is just the opposite. It is the principle of unselfishness. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth" (1 Corinthians 10:24). What a change would be produced in human affairs by the introduction of this principle. Instead of each individual working for himself, at the expense (as it so often is) of others, each one would have in view the interests of friends and neighbours. Instead of having only his own efforts upon which to depend for prosperity, he would have the united efforts of all those around him. Could the result be otherwise than the happiness and prosperity of each? It is rarely that an individual cannot be prosperous with the help of but one other person; how certain would his prosperity be, then, with the help and sympathy of all who know him! And this is what the gospel of Jesus Christ would do for the world if men would only let it. This age no more needs a different gospel than any other age before it.

Wednesday: A Way to Worship – Worship includes dealing justly with fellow men. "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily" (Isaiah 58:8). When will this be? – when thou dealest thy bread to the hungry, and bringest the poor that are cast out to thy house, and "when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him." Here is a promise of speedy health, and therefore health is possible. It must not be forgotten, however, that one of the conditions is "that ye break every yoke," loosing the bands of wickedness, and undoing the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free. This includes the yokes and bands that we have placed upon ourselves, as well as those with which we have oppressed others. Many of our chains we cling to; but surely such a result as is promised in our text is worth all self-denial, especially when that which we part with is a chain.

Thursday: Mercy and Faithfulness – One Sabbath day, Jesus' "disciples were a hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto Him, Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day" (Matthew 12:1-2). This was not, as many think, ignoring of the law, to make room for a higher claim, that of human need, but it was in view of the fact that what the disciples did was perfectly in harmony with the law. To the Pharisees Jesus said: "If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned *the guiltless*." The blessing of God is "life for evermore" (Psalms 133:3), and "His commandment is life everlasting" (John 12:50). God's law is not negative; it is positive, life-giving. It does not need to be set aside, in order that human needs should be met; no; it is impossible for one jot of its claims to abate; but the law makes provision for the satisfying of human need. Yea, the law exists for the sole purpose of satisfying the desire of every living thing.