

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – Part of God's Family – 31 Dec 2022-6 January 2023

Christ and His Father loves us with love that is not easily repulsed. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John 3:1). "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3). "I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people" (Isaiah 65:2). Though often rejected, He still woos sinful men, seeking to draw them to Himself. There is a void in the heart of God that can be filled only with the love of man. A lover in fancy clothes the object of his affection with all charms and graces, but the Lord does so really to His people, for whom He gave Himself. His love will transform them, and clothe them with the beauty of His own righteousness. "So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty" (Psalm 45:11). "He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

Sunday: We Are Part of God's Family – How can man be part of God's family? "Be partakers of the divine nature" (1 Peter 1:4), "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Romans 6:12). How? By the fact that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). How was it that Christ could be thus "compassed with infirmity" (Hebrews 5:2), and still know no sin? "God was in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19), and hence He could not sin. His humanity only veiled His divine nature, which was more than able to successfully resist the sinful passions of the flesh. There was in His whole life a struggle. The flesh, moved upon by the enemy of all unrighteousness, would tend to sin, yet His divine nature never for a moment harboured an evil desire, nor did His divine power for a moment waver. Having suffered in the flesh all that men can possibly suffer, He returned to the throne of the Father, as spotless as when He left the courts of glory. When He laid in the tomb, under the power of death, "it was impossible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24) because it had been impossible for the divine nature which dwelt in Him to sin. 'Well,' some will say, 'I do not see any comfort in this for me; it was not possible that the Son of God should sin, but I have not any such power.' Why not? You can have it if you want it. The same power which enabled Him to resist every temptation presented through the flesh, while He was "compassed with infirmity," can enable us to do the same. You say, 'Christ did not sin, because He was filled with fulness of God.' Well, then, listen to the apostle Paul, and learn what it is our privilege to have: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19). Christ, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9), may dwell in us, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Monday: God Is the Owner of Everything – How are we to regard ourselves and the wealth we possess in relation to God? God has paid the price of man's redemption, and in so doing has bought man himself. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). "Feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Money cannot repay Him, and if it could, no one could make payment, for "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). We are to make offerings to the Lord, but not with the thought that we are enriching Him. Our gifts, if they are real offerings to the Lord, are merely expressions of thanksgiving, and our confidence that He in whose hand are all things can care for us even though we spend all in His service. "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14). Since we are the purchase of God, it is evident that all that we have is His also. Although everything belongs to the Lord, He has placed the treasures of earth in man's possession, for him to use as he will, in order to test him. But He has told us that a

certain definite portion is His own in a peculiar sense. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30). It is the Lord's in such a sense that for one to appropriate it to his own use is to rob God. "Will a man rob God?" The natural answer would be that no one would dare do such a thing; but the Lord says, "Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? – In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation" (Malachi 3:8-9). The fact that God puts the property into man's hands, leaving it wholly to him to decide how he will use it, only increases the guilt; for he who embezzles money left to him in trust, increases the dishonour of the theft of that money.

Tuesday: Resources Available for God's Family – In the last paragraph the Lesson writer rightly says: 'whatever material possessions that we have, whatever gifts or talents we have been blessed with, we are indebted in every way to the Giver in how we use those gifts.' In this regard, how should we live as Debtors and to whom? When Christ dwells in the heart, the language will be "I am debtor." This was the case with the early disciples. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own" (Acts 4:32). The mind that was in them, that made them one, was the mind of Christ, who gave Himself. Such ones delight to give, and thank God for the privilege, so that they can say with David: "Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee." "I Am Debtor" (Romans 1:14) was the keynote of Paul's life, and it was the secret of his success. Men think 'the world owes them a living.' But Paul considered that he owed himself to the world. Yet he received nothing from the world but stripes and abuse. Even that which he had received before Christ found him was a total loss. But Christ had found him, given Himself to him, that he could say, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). As Christ's life was his life, and Christ gave Himself for the world, Paul necessarily became a debtor to the whole world. This has been the case of every man who has been a servant of the Lord. "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep" (Acts 13:36). "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28).

Wednesday: Responsibilities of God's Family Members – Why would love for God be expressed in keeping His law (1 John 5:3)? When God dwells in the heart, His will must reign there. His will then will be ours. Paul tells us what the will of God is: "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law" (Romans 2:17-18). God's law is His will, for they who are instructed out of the law know His will. So then, he who has the love God in his heart, has the law of God there, even as Christ, who said, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart" (Psalm 40:8). This is also plainly indicated in 1 John 5:2-3: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." Put this with Romans 5:5, and we find that to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, is to have the keeping of the commandments there. It is the nature of the New Covenant. This is the work that God has covenanted to do, for He says, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33). Let our response be Amen! and not as ancient Israel at Sinai enter Old Covenant to do the law!

Thursday: Treasure in Heaven – Where is your treasure kept? A man puts his money in a certain bank, it collapses, money is lost or reduced in value; 'how foolish', you say, 'why did he not put his money in a reliable bank?' But that is just what he thought he was doing, now with hindsight, he sees his mistake. Are we not in danger of making the same mistake if we trust our own judgment? The Lord says that there is only one bank in the universe that we can safely trust, He says, "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal" (Matthew 6:19-21).