

Lesson 9

Beware of Covetousness

Sabbath Afternoon, February 25

The whole heart must be yielded to God, or the change can never be wrought in us by which we are to be restored to His likeness. By nature we are alienated from God. The Holy Spirit describes our condition in such words as these: "Dead in trespasses and sins;" "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint;" "no soundness in it." We are held fast in the snare of Satan, "taken captive by him at his will." Ephesians 2:1; Isaiah 1:5, 6; 2 Timothy 2:26. God desires to heal us, to set us free. But since this requires an entire transformation, a renewing of our whole nature, we must yield ourselves wholly to Him.

The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness.

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[God] sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God.—Steps to Christ, p. 43.

Make God your entire dependence. When you do otherwise, then it is time for a halt to be called. Stop right where you are, and change the order of things. In sincerity, in soul-hunger, cry after God. Wrestle with the heavenly agencies until you have the victory. Put your whole being into the Lord's hands soul, body, and spirit, and resolve to be His loving, consecrated agency, moved by His will, controlled by His mind, infused by His Spirit . . . then you will see heavenly things clearly.

If we would permit our minds to dwell more upon Christ and the heavenly world, we should find a powerful stimulus and support in fighting the battles of the Lord. Pride and love of the world will lose their power as we contemplate the glories of that better land so soon to be our home. Beside the loveliness of Christ, all earthly attractions will seem of little worth.—Sons and Daughters of God, p. 105.

Constant, self-denying benevolence is God's remedy for the cankering sins of selfishness and covetousness. God has arranged systematic benevolence to sustain His cause and relieve the necessities of the suffering and needy. He has ordained that giving should become a habit, that it may counteract the dangerous and deceitful sin of covetousness. Continual giving starves covetousness to death. Systematic benevolence is designed in the order of God to tear away treasures from the covetous as fast as they are gained and to consecrate them to the Lord, to whom they belong. . . .

The constant practice of God's plan of systematic benevolence weakens covetousness and strengthens benevolence. If riches increase, men, even those professing godliness, set their hearts upon them; and the more they have, the less they give to the treasury of the Lord. Thus riches make men selfish, and hoarding feeds covetousness; and these evils strengthen by active exercise. God knows our danger and has hedged us about with means to prevent our own ruin.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 548.

Sunday, February 26: The Ultimate Original Sin?

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. But a change came over this happy state. . . .

Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation. The Scripture says, "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." Ezekiel 28:17. "Thou hast said in thine heart, . . . I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will be like the Most High." Isaiah 14:13, 14. Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself. And coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone.—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35.

Many who claim to believe in God deny Him by their works. Their worship of money, houses, and lands marks them as idolaters and apostates. All selfishness is covetousness, and is, therefore, idolatry. Many who have placed their names on the church roll, as believers in God and the Bible, are worshiping the goods the Lord has entrusted to them that they may be His almoners. They may not literally bow down before their earthly treasure, but nevertheless it is their god. They are worshipers of mammon. To the things of this world they offer the homage which belongs to the Creator. He who sees and knows all things records the falsity of their profession.

From the soul temple of a worldly Christian, God is excluded, in order that worldly policy may have abundant room. Money is his god. It belongs to Jehovah, but he to whom it is entrusted refuses to let it flow forth in deeds of benevolence. Did he appropriate it in accordance with God's design, the incense of his good works would ascend to heaven, and from thousands of converted souls would be heard songs of praise and thanksgiving. —Counsels on Stewardship, p. 223.

Pure religion brings peace, happiness, contentment; godliness is profitable to this life and the life to come.

That unrest and discontent which ends in fretting and complaining is sinful; but the discontent with one's self which urges on to more earnest effort for greater improvement of the mind for a broader field of usefulness is praiseworthy. This discontent does not end in disappointment but in gathering force for a higher and more extended field of usefulness. Only be ever balanced by firm religious principle and a sensitive conscience, having ever the fear of God before you, and you will certainly prosper in becoming fitted for a life of usefulness.—Our High Calling, p. 242.

Monday, February 27: An Accursed Thing in the Camp

To establish his guilt beyond all question, leaving no ground for the charge that he had been unjustly condemned, Joshua solemnly adjured Achan to acknowledge the truth. The wretched man made full confession of his crime: "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel. . . . When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekel's weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent."

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Of the millions of Israel there was but one man who, in that solemn hour of triumph and of judgment, had dared to transgress the command of God. Achan's covetousness was excited by the sight of that costly robe of Shinar; even when it had brought him face to face with death he called it "a goodly Babylonish garment." One sin had led to another, and he appropriated the gold and silver devoted to the treasury of the Lord—he robbed God of the first fruits of the land of Canaan.—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 495, 496.

He who looks at earthly things as the chief good, he who spends his life in an effort to gain worldly riches, is indeed making a poor investment. Too late he will see that in which he has trusted crumbling into dust. It is only through self-denial, through the sacrifice of earthly riches, that the eternal riches can be obtained. It is through much tribulation that the Christian enters the kingdom of heaven. Constantly he is to war the good warfare, not laying down his weapons until Christ bids him rest. Only by giving all to Christ can he secure the inheritance that will endure through all eternity.—This Day With God, p. 152.

Thousands are making the same mistake as did the Pharisees whom Christ reproved at Matthew's feast. Rather than give up some cherished idea, or discard some idol of opinion, many refuse the truth which comes down from the Father of light. They trust in self, and depend upon their own wisdom, and do not realize their spiritual poverty. They insist on being saved in some way by which they may perform some important work. When they see that there is no way of weaving self into the work, they reject the salvation provided.

A legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposing sacrifice, proclaim that the doer of these things regards himself as righteous, and as entitled to heaven; but it is all a deception. Our own works can never purchase salvation. . . .

Man must be emptied of self before he can be, in the fullest sense, a believer in Jesus. When self is renounced, then the Lord can make man a new creature. New bottles can contain the new wine. The love of Christ will animate the believer with new life. In him who looks unto the Author and Finisher of our faith the character of Christ will be manifest.—The Desire of Ages, p. 280.

Tuesday, February 28: The Heart of Judas

Judas had valuable qualities, but there were some traits in his character that would have to be cut away before he could be saved. He must be born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible. His great hereditary and cultivated tendency to evil was covetousness. And by practice this became a habit which he carried into all his trading. . . .

He was given every opportunity to receive Christ as his personal Saviour, but he refused this gift. He would not yield his way and will to Christ. He did not practice that which was contrary to his own inclinations; therefore his strong avaricious spirit was not corrected. While he continued a disciple in outward form, and while in the very presence of Christ, he appropriated to himself means that belonged to the Lord's treasury.

Judas might have been benefited by these lessons, had he possessed a desire to be right at heart; but his acquisitiveness overcame him, and the love of money became a ruling power. Through indulgence, he permitted this trait in his character to grow and take so deep a root that it crowded out the good seed of truth sown in his heart.—Counsels on Stewardship, pp. 219, 220.

[M]oney was to Judas a continual temptation, and from time to time, when he did a little service for Christ, or devoted a little time to religious purposes, he paid himself out of the meager fund collected to advance the light of the gospel. He finally became so penurious that he made bitter complaint because the ointment poured upon the head of Jesus was expensive. He turned it over and over in his mind, and counted the money that might have been placed in his hands to expend if that ointment had been sold. His selfishness grew stronger until he felt that the treasury had really met with a great loss in not receiving the value of the ointment in money. He finally made open complaint of the extravagance of this expensive offering to Christ. Our Saviour rebuked him for this covetousness. This rankled in the heart of Judas, until, for a small sum of money, he consented to betray his Lord. There will be those among Sabbathkeepers who are no truer at heart than was Judas.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 42.

If we draw nigh to God, we shall draw nigh to one another. We cannot draw nigh to the same cross without coming into unity of spirit. Christ prayed that His disciples should be one as He and the Father are one. We should seek to be one in spirit and in understanding. We should seek to be one that God may be glorified in us as He was glorified in the Son, and God will love us as He loves His Son.

God loves you. He does not wish to draw you nigh to Him to hurt you, oh, no; but to comfort you, to pour in the oil of rejoicing, to heal the wounds that sin has made, to bind up where Satan has bruised. He wants to give you the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.—That I May Know Him, p. 246.

Wednesday, March 1: Ananias and Sapphira

God hates hypocrisy and falsehood. Ananias and Sapphira practiced fraud in their dealing with God; they lied to the Holy Spirit, and their sin was visited with swift and terrible judgment. When Ananias came with his offering, Peter said: "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

"Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things." . . .

Infinite Wisdom saw that this signal manifestation of the wrath of God was necessary to guard the young church from becoming demoralized. Their numbers were rapidly increasing. The church would have been endangered if, in the rapid increase of converts, men and women had been added who, while professing to serve God, were worshipping mammon. This judgment testified that men cannot deceive God, that He detects the hidden sin of the heart, and that He will not be mocked. It was designed as a warning to the church, to lead them to avoid pretense and hypocrisy, and to beware of robbing God.—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 72, 73.

[T]here are those who are guilty of the same sin as Ananias and Sapphira, thinking that if they withhold a portion of what God claims in the tithing system the brethren will never know it. Thus thought the guilty couple whose example is given us as a warning. God in this case proves that He searches the heart. The motives and purposes of man cannot be hidden from Him. He has left a perpetual warning to Christians of all ages to beware of the sin to which the hearts of men are continually inclined.

Although no visible marks of God's displeasure follow the repetition of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira now, yet the sin is just as heinous in the sight of God and will as surely be visited upon the transgressor in the day of judgment, and many will feel the curse of God even in this life. When a pledge is made to the cause, it is a vow made to God and should be sacredly kept. In the sight of God it is no better than sacrilege to appropriate to our own use that which has been once pledged to advance His sacred work.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 469.

Self-sacrifice is the keynote of Christ's teachings. Often this is enjoined upon believers in language that seems authoritative, because there is no other way to save men than to cut them away from their life of selfishness. Christ gave, in His life on earth, a true representation of the power of the gospel. . . . To every soul who will suffer with Him in resistance of sin, in labor for His cause, in self-denial for the good of others, He promises a part in the eternal reward of the righteous. Through the exercise of the spirit that characterized His lifework, we are to become partakers of His nature. Partaking in this life of sacrifice for the sake of others, we shall share with Him in the life to come the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."—"A Work of Preparation," Review and Herald, September 28, 1911.

Thursday, March 2: Overcoming Covetousness

The deadly sin that led to Achan's ruin had its root in covetousness, of all sins one of the most common and the most lightly regarded. While other offenses meet with detection and punishment, how rarely does the violation of the tenth commandment so much as call forth censure. The enormity of this sin, and its terrible results, are the lessons of Achan's history.

Covetousness is an evil of gradual development. Achan had cherished greed of gain until it became a habit, binding him in fetters well-nigh impossible to break. While fostering this evil, he would have been filled with horror at the thought of bringing disaster upon Israel; but his perceptions were deadened by sin, and when temptation came, he fell an easy prey.

Are not similar sins still committed, in the face of warnings as solemn and explicit? We are as directly forbidden to indulge covetousness as was Achan to appropriate the spoils of Jericho. God has declared it to be idolatry. We are warned, . . . "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." Luke 12:15. . . . We have before us the fearful doom of Achan, of Judas, of Ananias and Sapphira. Back of all these we have that of Lucifer, the "son of the morning," who, coveting a higher state, forfeited forever the brightness and bliss of heaven. And yet, notwithstanding all these warnings, covetousness abounds.—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 496.

God has provided that we shall not be tempted above what we are able to bear, but that with every temptation He will make a way of escape. If we live wholly for God, we shall not allow the mind to indulge in selfish imaginings.

If there is any way by which Satan can gain access to the mind, he will sow his tares and cause them to grow until they will yield an abundant harvest. In no case can Satan obtain dominion over the thoughts, words, and actions, unless we voluntarily open the door and invite him to enter. He will then come in and, by catching away the good seed sown in the heart, make of none effect the truth.

All who name the name of Christ need to watch and pray and guard the avenues of the soul, for Satan is at work to corrupt and destroy if the least advantage is given him.—The Adventist Home, p. 402.

(1 Corinthians 10:12, 13). These words are given for the people while they are in connection with the world, subject to temptations and influences which are deceiving and deluding. While they stay their mind upon Him who is their sun and their shield, the blackness and darkness that surround them will not leave one spot or stain upon their garments. They will walk with Christ. They will pray and believe and work to save the souls that are ready to perish. These are trying to break the bands that Satan has fastened upon them, and they will not be put to shame if by faith they will make Christ their companion. Temptations and deceptions will be constantly brought up by the great deceiver to spoil the work of the human agent, but if he trusts in God, if he is humble and meek and lowly of heart, keeping the way of the Lord, heaven will rejoice, for he will gain the victory.—Ellen G. White Comments, in The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 960.

Friday, March 3: For Further Reading

Our High Calling, "Let Jesus Lead," p. 38;

Reflecting Christ, "Christ a Perfect Example for All," p. 37.