

***Sabbath School Today***  
**With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

***The Least of These:  
Ministering to Those in Need***  
**Lesson 1: God Created . . .**

In this new series of Sabbath school lessons we have an opportunity to explore “justice” issues for humanity with the added emphasis of God’s Good News for the human family. The old tired perspective of viewing humanity from a legalistic prism is outmoded when we see each one as God’s Creation and redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. Now is the time when the 1888 concept of God’s more abundant grace comes into its own more than ever before.

“The rich and poor have this in common: the LORD made them both” (Prov. 22:2). “The rich and poor” have one common tie, we are made in the image of God. And that places a unique value upon each one as made by the Master Craftsman.

“The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it” (Gen. 2:15). God ordained that the human role in creation was to be co-managers with Him. God’s purpose for us is “to tend and watch over” His creation. As Nathan Brown writes: “In oppressing and exploiting those who are weak and vulnerable, we actively deny our mutual Creator and thus disavow substantive belief in creationism. On the other hand, helping the poor honors—even worships—the Creator and, as such, is a marker of true belief in creationism.” [1]

Someone hears a sermon that tells people to think of themselves as no good sinners. Then he hears another one: you must love yourself. You ask: who’s right? As I understand the gospel, the entire human race would have perished forever “in Adam” when he sinned if Christ had not been “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Thus, in honest truth, apart from Him, we would be (and are) nothing.

But we are something—we have been created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ’s sacrifice. Thus we find our identity “in Him.” We respect ourselves—and *others*—not because of some inherent pantheistic worth in ourselves, but as His creation and the purchase of the cross of Christ. This at once delivers us from arrogance and pride because of how well we do and what we see ourselves to be, and at the same time delivers us from groveling in the dust as though we are worthless. In other words, true self-worth is “in Christ” who is the Creator. Now we can hold our head high, and at the same time cherish true humility of soul, realizing that our identity, our future, our prestige, all we are and will ever be, is by the grace of Christ.

So, is there a constant tension? Yes! What makes your Steinway or Baldwin sound so grand is the constant tension the strings are under. Loosen them to be flabby and the music is gone. Luther wisely said we are sinners and saints at the same time. Yes! We

never “love” self, but we respect ourselves “in Christ.” Jesus taught us that as we are born naturally loving self, so now we are to *love others* (Matt. 19:19). We have enormous *self-respect* and healthy humility at the same time—“in Christ.”

It makes little difference whether we are trapped in a net of legalism—trying to make ourselves acceptable to God by our own efforts—or lured into the delusion that Christ did it all for us on the cross. Either heresy robs us of “the faith that works by love and purifies the soul.” There is in the church today a great deal of discussion of “righteousness by faith,” but too often a failure to understand that only by “beholding” the *agape* love revealed by our Creator on the cross, can the perfect character of Jesus be reproduced in us.

This is the message of Christ’s righteousness which was offered to the church in 1888—the light of the “other angel” of Revelation 18 that is to lighten the earth with its glory. It was “to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour. ... Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the *human family*.” [2]

God’s last day people, yes those of us living on planet Earth just before the coming of Jesus Christ in the clouds of Heaven will need to have a clear understanding that the Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, who is the express image of God is not far off, he does not need our long speeches, or frantic running about even in doing the “good” things to impress Him. No, he does not even need us try to appease him. Jesus Christ has already borne the full penalty for the sins of *every human being*, he “tasted death for every man, woman and child” no one need wake up in the night in a cold sweat wondering if Our Father in heaven accepts them. No!

He isn’t far off. He is near you and will be in you by the indwelling Holy Spirit. When we begin to realize His closeness to us, appreciate His love and sacrifice for the human race, we will no longer call him lord, or master, we will call Him husband (Hosea 2:6, 7), we will know He loves us and we will appreciate how close He had to come to create and then to save us. We will love Him too. And we love those for whom He died.

—Paul E. Penno

#### **Endnotes:**

[1] Nathan Brown, *For the Least of These* (Bible Book Shelf 3Q 2019), Pacific Press Publishing Association, © 2019, p. 13.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 91, 92 (emphasis added).

#### **Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUKY\\_NgCxnw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUKY_NgCxnw)

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