

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Oneness in Christ
Lesson 1: Creation and Fall

Not a few are deeply concerned about disunity in the church. Leadership through the mainstream church media are appealing for tolerance. Liberal media say the church is “facing its worst threat to unity in many decades.” A church consisting of 20+ million adherents worldwide of such diversity might be expected to face challenges.

We are told that it’s man’s fault that disunity with God was welcomed to earth. It is God who seeks to bring healing to the rift through His Good News.

But every beautiful truth that God teaches us in His Bible has been twisted and distorted by the master enemy, Satan, to bring about disunity among God’s people. Satan’s clever deceptions have even been injected into the teaching of God’s new covenant (Thursday’s lesson).

The truth as the Bible teaches it is so simple that a child can easily grasp it. God’s 1888 “messengers” saw it clearly from the Word. When God Himself makes a “covenant,” it is always a simple, straightforward promise on His part. No gimmicks, no small print, no “bargains” struck, no “ifs” that can be used to get Him off the hook so He can wriggle out of keeping His promise. In fact, when God makes a “covenant,” He goes the second mile and swears an oath that puts His own life and His throne in pawn if He doesn’t do what He promises (see Gen. 15:7-18; Heb. 6:13-20). That promise of God was made to Abraham, and confirmed by His solemn oath. God would give him the whole earth for “an everlasting possession” together with the righteousness necessary to inherit it.

When the Lord promised Abraham, He stipulated no “bargain” or “transaction” terms. It was a give-and-take relationship—God would do all the giving, and Abraham would do all the taking. And how did Abraham “take” the blessing? Totally by faith. Abraham “believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; remember, we are Abraham’s “children”). “Abraham believed” His promises—a heart-melting appreciation of the love of God that has redeemed humanity at the cross. Such faith is the kind that is alive, which “works.” It reconciles alienated hearts to God and therefore at the same time reconciles their hearts to His holy law.

But for nearly 4000 years both Abraham and his descendants have twisted and distorted this simple good news. Abraham proposed to God that he help Him out of His difficulty by adopting Eliezer, a slave, to be his “heir” (15:2-4). God said No! Then Sarah, embittered because she couldn’t get pregnant, proposed that she help God out of His difficulty by adopting a slave-girl’s son from Abraham as her own (16:1-4). Again God said No! (17:1-19). The Lord insisted that everything would be His doing 100 percent.

And here is where the battle has raged these thousands of years. We are all “born in sin,” inheriting a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5; Rom. 7:14-17). It’s easy *not* to believe. Faith humbles our hearts! The result? We ourselves have invented the “old covenant,” our promises to God. Somehow we *must* help save ourselves!

Don’t you wish when you were younger you had understood that God’s great promises to Abraham were to you also. Nobody told us! Our whole life would have been different. All that God promised Abraham was precisely what worries us. (Teens are the most worried people on earth.) We wanted to be “a great nation,” that is, we want to be “somebody.” We don’t want to be just a number in humanity. We want to live for a purpose, to amount to something.

Are we sinful? Of course we are! But the desire to be “somebody” is also God-given; and He wants every person to hear His promise, “I will make of you somebody important!”

We also need to hear Him tell us, “I will bless thee.” That will lift a load of fear from our hearts. And yes, we want to hear Him tell us that He will make our name “great” in some meaningful way. We don’t want to be a glob of jelly, a “blah” person. We want to be “some one” in others’ eyes!

And yes, sinful though we are, we do indeed dream of God doing for us what He promised to do for Abraham, “And thou shalt *be* a blessing.” From our dawn of consciousness we dream of becoming something for God. We don’t know how, but we want to be a useful person in God’s great plan for the world. Oh, we can be so happy if we know that all along God is promising us these wonderful things He promised Abraham!

All seven of those fantastic promises in Genesis 12:2, 3 will rejoice our hearts if only we know that God is telling us all that! We can stand taller and walk more sprightly when we know His promises are for us. We can study better, develop our abilities more efficiently.

And best of all, if we know that God is promising us that someday we will fellowship with Christ in “all families of the earth being blessed,” that by His grace we will be an agent He can use in some little but meaningful way to convey that “blessing” everywhere we will go—oh, the new covenant will make all the difference in our thinking and lives. Don’t you think it will go a long way in healing disunity in the church?

Now, how about passing on those new covenant promises to someone else?

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/0HtR-Urz8So>

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