

The Problem of Evil

Sabbath Afternoon, February 8

God is love. The evil that is in the world comes not from His hands, but from our great adversary, whose work it has ever been to deprave man, and enfeeble and pervert his faculties. But God has not left us in the ruin wrought by the fall. . . . We are His—His purchased possession. The human family cost God and His Son Jesus Christ an infinite price.

The world's Redeemer, the only-begotten Son of God, by His perfect obedience to the law, by His life and character, redeemed that which was lost in the fall, and made it possible for man to obey that holy law of righteousness which Adam transgressed. Christ did not exchange His divinity for humanity, but combined humanity with divinity; and in humanity He lived the law in behalf of the human family. The sins of everyone who will receive Christ were set to His account, and He has fully satisfied the justice of God. — *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 429.

God did not create evil, He only made the good, which was like Himself. But Satan would not be content to know the will of God and do it. His curiosity was on the stretch to know that which God had not designed he should know. Evil, sin, and death were not created by God; they are the result of disobedience, which originated in Satan. But the knowledge of evil now in the world was brought in through the cunning of Satan. These are very hard and expensive lessons; but men will learn them, and many will never be convinced that it is bliss to be ignorant of a certain kind of knowledge, which arises from unsatisfied desires and unholy aims.

The sons and daughters of Adam are fully as inquisitive and presumptuous as was Eve in seeking forbidden knowledge. They gain an experience, a knowledge, which God never designed they should have, and the result will be, as it was to our first parents, the loss of their Eden home. When will human beings learn that which is demonstrated so thoroughly before them? — *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 503.

"God is love." 1 John 4:16. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be. "The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," whose "ways are everlasting," changeth not. With Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Isaiah 57:15; Habakkuk 3:6; James 1:17.

Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love. The sovereignty of God involves fullness of blessing to all created beings. . . .

The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love. — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 33.

Sunday, February 9

“How Long, O Lord?”

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise.” 2 Peter 3:9. He does not forget or neglect His children; but He permits the wicked to reveal their true character, that none who desire to do His will may be deceived concerning them. . . . [T]he righteous are placed in the furnace of affliction, that they themselves may be purified; that their example may convince others of the reality of faith and godliness; and also that their consistent course may condemn the ungodly and unbelieving.

God permits the wicked to prosper and to reveal their enmity against Him, that when they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquity all may see His justice and mercy in their utter destruction. The day of His vengeance hastens, when all who have transgressed His law and oppressed His people will meet the just recompense of their deeds; when every act of cruelty or injustice toward God’s faithful ones will be punished as though done to Christ Himself. —*The Great Controversy*, p. 48.

In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, nor shrink from vindicating the honor of God. Those upon whom rests the burden of this work will not hold their peace when wrong is done, neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. They will remember that God is no respecter of persons, and that severity to a few may prove mercy to many. They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed. —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 675.

[Christ] is nailed to the cross, and hangs suspended between the heavens and the earth. The glorious Redeemer of a lost world was suffering the penalty of man’s transgression of the Father’s law. He was about to ransom His people with His own blood.

Oh, was there ever suffering and sorrow like that endured by the dying Saviour! It was the sense of His Father’s displeasure which made His cup so bitter. It was not bodily suffering which so quickly ended the life of Christ upon the cross. It was the crushing weight of the sins of the world, and a sense of His Father’s wrath. The fierce temptation that His own Father had forever left Him caused that piercing cry from the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

In His dying agony, as He yields up His precious life, He has by faith alone to trust in Him whom it has ever been His joy to obey. . . . Denied even bright hope and confidence in the triumph which will be His in the future, He cries with a loud voice: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). He is acquainted with the character of His Father, with His justice, His mercy, and His great love, and in submission He drops into His hands. —*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 170.

Monday, February 10

“There Are Many Things We Do Not Know”

Divine inspiration asks many questions which the most profound scholar cannot answer. These questions were not asked, supposing that we could answer them, but to call our attention to the deep mysteries of God, and to make men know that their wisdom is limited; that in the common things of daily life there are mysteries past the comprehension of finite minds; that the judgment and purposes of God are past finding out, His wisdom unsearchable. If He reveals Himself to man, it is by shrouding Himself in the thick cloud of mystery.

God's purpose is to conceal more of Himself than He makes known to man. Could men fully understand the ways and works of God, they would not then believe Him to be the infinite One. He is not to be comprehended by man in His wisdom, and reasons, and purposes. “His ways are past finding out” [Romans 11:33]. His love can never be explained upon natural principles. If this could be done, we would not feel that we could trust Him with the interests of our souls. Skeptics refuse to believe, because with their finite minds they cannot comprehend the infinite power by which God reveals Himself to men. —Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1141.

What lessons of humility and faith may we not learn as we trace the dealings of God with His creatures. The Lord can do but little for the children of men, because they are so full of pride and vain glory. They exalt self, magnifying their own strength, learning, and wisdom. It is necessary for God to disappoint their hopes and frustrate their plans, that they may learn to trust in Him alone. All our powers are from God; we can do nothing independent of the strength which He has given us. Where is the man or woman or child that God does not sustain? Where is the desolate place which God does not fill? Where is the want that any but God can supply?

He would have us make Him our protector and our guide in all the duties and affairs of life. —Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, 1141.

“The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1), and revealed to His servant the might of His power. When Job caught a glimpse of his Creator, he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes. Then the Lord was able to bless him abundantly and to make his last years the best of his life.

Hope and courage are essential to perfect service for God. These are the fruit of faith. Despondency is sinful and unreasonable. God is able and willing “more abundantly” (Hebrews 6:17) to bestow upon His servants the strength they need for test and trial. The plans of the enemies of His work may seem to be well laid and firmly established, but God can overthrow the strongest of these. And this He does in His own time and way, when He sees that the faith of His servants has been sufficiently tested. —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 164.

Tuesday, February 11

The Skeptical Theist

We do not understand the greatness and majesty of God nor remember the immeasurable distance between the Creator and the creatures formed by His hand. He who sitteth in the heavens, swaying the scepter of the universe, does not judge according to our finite standard, nor reckon according to our computation. We are in error if we think that that which is great to us must be great to God, and that which is small to us must be small to Him. He would be no more exalted than ourselves if He possessed only the same faculties. . . .

God speaks through His prophet: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts, are not your thoughts neither are your ways, My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." We need clear discernment, that we may measure sin by the Lord's standard and not by our own. Let us take for our rule, not human opinions, but the divine word. — *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 337.*

The psalmist David in his experience had many changes of mind. At times, as he obtained views of God's will and ways, he was highly exalted. Then as he caught sight of the reverse of God's mercy and changeless love, everything seemed to be shrouded in a cloud of darkness. But through the darkness he obtained a view of the attributes of God, which gave him confidence and strengthened his faith. But when he meditated upon the difficulties and danger of life, they looked so forbidding that he thought himself abandoned by God because of his sins. . . .

But as he wept and prayed, he obtained a clearer view of the character and attributes of God. —Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1149.*

As David considered His pledges and promises to [the children of Israel], knowing they were for all who need them as much as for Israel, he appropriated them to himself, saying, "I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doing."

His faith laid hold of God, and he was strengthened and encouraged; although he recognized God's ways as mysterious, yet he knew they were merciful and good; for this was His character as revealed to Moses. . . .

As David appropriated these promises and privileges to himself he decided that he would no longer be hasty in judgment, becoming discouraged, and casting himself down in helpless despair. His soul took courage as he contemplated the general character of God as displayed in His teaching, His forbearance, His surpassing greatness and mercy, and he saw that the works and wonders of God are to have no confined application. —Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1149.*

The Freewill Defense

The reins of self-government were placed in [Adam's] hands. Judgment, reason, and conscience were to bear sway. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Adam and Eve were permitted to partake of every tree in the garden save one. There was a single prohibition. The forbidden tree was as attractive and lovely as any of the trees in the garden. It was called the tree of knowledge because in partaking of that tree of which God had said, "Thou shalt not eat of it," they would have a knowledge of sin, an experience in disobedience. — *Confrontation*, p. 12.

God might have created man without the power to transgress His law; He might have withheld the hand of Adam from touching the forbidden fruit; but in that case man would have been, not a free moral agent, but a mere automaton. Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced. There could have been no development of character. It would have been unworthy of man as an intelligent being, and would have sustained Satan's charge of God's arbitrary rule.

[God] endowed [Adam] with high intellectual powers, and presented before him the strongest possible inducements to be true to his allegiance. Obedience, perfect and perpetual, was the condition of eternal happiness. On this condition he was to have access to the tree of life.

So long as they remained loyal to the divine law, their capacity to know, to enjoy, and to love would continually increase. They would be constantly gaining new treasures of knowledge, discovering fresh springs of happiness, and obtaining clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the immeasurable, unending love of God. — *Conflict and Courage*, p. 13.

Every soul has a heaven to win, and a hell to shun. And the angelic agencies are all ready to come to the help of the tried and tempted soul. He, the Son of the infinite God, endured the test and trial in our behalf. The cross of Calvary stands vividly before every soul. When the cases of all are judged, and they [the lost] are delivered to suffer for their contempt for God and their disregard of His honor in their disobedience, not one will have an excuse, not one will need to have perished. It was left to their own choice who should be their prince, Christ or Satan. All the help Christ received, every man may receive in the great trial. The cross stands as a pledge that not one need be lost, that abundant help is provided for every soul. We can conquer the satanic agencies, or we can join ourselves with the powers that seek to counterwork the work of God in our world. — *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 96.

Thursday, February 13

Love and Evil?

In all ages God's appointed witnesses have exposed themselves to reproach and persecution for the truth's sake. Joseph was maligned and persecuted because he preserved his virtue and integrity. David, the chosen messenger of God, was hunted like a beast of prey by his enemies. Daniel was cast into a den of lions because he was true to his allegiance to heaven. Job was deprived of his worldly possessions, and so afflicted in body that he was abhorred by his relatives, and friends; yet he maintained his integrity. . . . Paul was imprisoned, beaten with rods, stoned, and finally put to death because he was a faithful messenger for God to the Gentiles. . . .

These examples of human steadfastness bear witness to the faithfulness of God's promises—of His abiding presence and sustaining grace. They testify to the power of faith to withstand the powers of the world. It is the work of faith to rest in God in the darkest hour, to feel, however sorely tried and tempest-tossed, that our Father is at the helm. The eye of faith alone can look beyond the things of time to estimate aright the worth of the eternal riches. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 575.

If you are called to go through the fiery furnace for His sake, Jesus will be by your side even as He was with the faithful three in Babylon. Those who love their Redeemer will rejoice at every opportunity of sharing with Him humiliation and reproach. The love they bear their Lord makes suffering for His sake sweet.

In all ages Satan has persecuted the people of God. He has tortured them and put them to death, but in dying they became conquerors. They revealed in their steadfast faith a mightier One than Satan. Satan could torture and kill the body, but he could not touch the life that was hid with Christ in God. . . . They could look beyond the gloom to the glory, saying, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Romans 8:18. —*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 30.

Will man take hold of divine power, and with determination and perseverance resist Satan, as Christ has given him example in His conflict with the foe in the wilderness of temptation? God cannot save man against his will from the power of Satan's artifices. Man must work with his human power, aided by the divine power of Christ, to resist and to conquer at any cost to himself. In short, man must overcome as Christ overcame. And then, through the victory that it is his privilege to gain by the all-powerful name of Jesus, he may become an heir of God and joint heir with Jesus Christ. This could not be the case if Christ alone did all the overcoming. Man must do his part; he must be victor on his own account, through the strength and grace that Christ gives him. Man must be a co-worker with Christ in the labor of overcoming, and then he will be partaker with Christ of His glory. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 32.

Friday, February 14

For Further Reading

Steps to Christ, "God's Love for Man," pp. 9–15;

Reflecting Christ, "God Teaches Self-Distrust Through Trials," p. 358.