

Free Will, Love, and Divine Providence

Sabbath Afternoon, February 15

The dealings of God with His people should be often repeated. How frequently were the waymarks set up by the Lord in His dealings with ancient Israel! Lest they should forget the history of the past, He commanded Moses to frame these events into song, that parents might teach them to their children. They were to gather up memorials and to lay them up in sight. Special pains were taken to preserve them, that when the children should inquire concerning these things, the whole story might be repeated. Thus the providential dealings and the marked goodness and mercy of God in His care and deliverance of His people were kept in mind. We are exhorted to call to "remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." Hebrews 10:32. For His people in this generation the Lord has wrought as a wonder-working God. The past history of the cause of God needs to be often brought before the people, young and old. We need often to recount God's goodness and to praise Him for His wonderful works. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 364.

There are three ways in which the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others. How may we know His voice from that of a stranger? How shall we distinguish it from the voice of a false shepherd? God reveals His will to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. His voice is also revealed in His providential workings; and it will be recognized if we do not separate our souls from Him by walking in our own ways, doing according to our own wills, and following the promptings of an unsanctified heart, until the senses have become so confused that eternal things are not discerned, and the voice of Satan is so disguised that it is accepted as the voice of God. . . .

Another way in which God's voice is heard is through the appeals of His Holy Spirit, making impressions upon the heart, which will be wrought out in the character. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 512.

Daily annoyances beset the path of young and old. Those who would live patient, loving, cheerful lives must pray. Only by receiving constant help from God can we gain the victory over self.

Each morning consecrate yourselves and your children to God for that day. Make no calculation for months or years; these are not yours. One brief day is given you. As if it were your last on earth, work during its hours for the Master. Lay all your plans before God, to be carried out or given up, as His providence shall indicate. Accept His plans instead of your own, even though their acceptance requires the abandonment of cherished projects. Thus the life will be molded more and more after the divine example; "and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 44.

Sunday, February 16

Our Sovereign God

In the face of the most positive commands of God, [many] men and women will follow their own inclinations and then dare to pray over the matter, to prevail upon God to consent to allow them to go contrary to His expressed will. The Lord is not pleased with such prayers. Satan comes to the side of such persons, as he did to Eve in Eden. . . . The religious world is covered with a pall of moral darkness. Superstition and bigotry control the minds of men and women, and blind their judgment so that they do not discern their duty to their fellow men and their duty to yield unquestioned obedience to the will of God. . . .

But God will not be trifled with. He will permit such persons to follow the desires of their own hearts. Psalm 81:11, 12: "But My people would not hearken to My voice." "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 72, 73.

When you make failures, when you are betrayed into sin, do not feel that you cannot pray, that you are not worthy to come before the Lord. . . . With outstretched arms He waits to welcome the prodigal. Go to Him, and tell Him about your mistakes and failures. Ask Him to strengthen you for fresh endeavor. He will never disappoint you, never abuse your confidence. . . .

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Christ knows the strength of your temptations and the strength of your power to resist. His hand is always stretched out in pitying tenderness to every suffering child. To the tempted, discouraged one He says, Child for whom I suffered and died, cannot you trust me? "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). —*Lift Him Up*, p. 299.

Oh, how greatly Christ is dishonored by those who, professing to be Christians, disgrace the name they bear by failing to make their lives correspond to their profession, by failing to treat one another with the love and respect that God expects them to reveal in kind words and courteous acts!

The powers from beneath are stirred with deep intensity. War and bloodshed are the result. The moral atmosphere is poisoned with cruel, horrible doings. The spirit of strife is spreading; it abounds in every place. . . .

One who sees beneath the surface, who reads the hearts of all men, says of those who have had great light: . . . "Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before Mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," "but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Isaiah 66:3, 4; 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 10, 12. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 248, 249.

Monday February 17

Pantokrator

With Christ [God] gave all heaven, that the moral image of God might be restored in man. . . . His gift could not be greater; for it embraces infinity. His grace in all its vastness is provided for all. There is no excuse for any to retain selfishness. In the hearts of all who receive him, Christ will be formed, the hope of glory. The Saviour says to everyone for whom he has died, You must receive the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption. You must become so united with God that you will impart the grace you have received. Thus you become a living channel, by which God can communicate his light to the world.

God can not approve our work while it has in it one thread of selfishness. It was apparently a small transgression that closed the gates of paradise against Adam and Eve. But ever since then sin has been increasing in volume and prevalence, and it is still increasing. But notwithstanding this, the divine benevolence has not been cut off. God's love and care still flow earthward. — "Christ Our Example," *The General Conference Bulletin*, October 1, 1890.

The Lord does not save sinners by abrogating his law, the foundation of his government in heaven and earth. God is a judge, the guardian of justice. The transgression of his law in a single instance, in the smallest particular, is sin. God cannot dispense with his law, he cannot do away with its smallest item, in order to pardon sin. The justice, the moral excellence, of the law must be maintained and vindicated before the heavenly universe. And that holy law could not be maintained at any smaller price than the death of the Son of God. — "Christ's Attitude Toward the Law," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 15, 1898.

The Lord sees that prayer is often mixed with earthliness. Men pray for that which will gratify their selfish desires, and the Lord does not fulfill their requests in the way which they expect. He takes them through tests and trials, He brings them through humiliations, until they see more clearly what their necessities are. . . . When we come to God we must be submissive and contrite of heart, subordinating everything to His sacred will.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed to His Father, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39). The cup which He prayed should be removed from Him, that looked so bitter to His soul, was the cup of separation from God in consequence of the sin of the world. . . . The spirit of submission that Christ manifested in offering up His prayer before God is the spirit that is acceptable to God. Let the soul feel its need, its helplessness, its nothingness; let all its energies be called forth in an earnest desire for help, and help will come. — *In Heavenly Places*, p. 89.

Tuesday, February 18

To Love God

The Lord will not compel men to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God; He sets before the human agent good and evil, and makes plain what will be the sure result of following one course or the other. Christ invites us, saying, "Follow Me." But we are never forced to walk in His footsteps. If we do walk in His footsteps, it is the result of deliberate choice. As we see the life and character of Christ, strong desire is awakened to be like Him in character; and we follow on to know the Lord, and to know His goings forth are prepared as the morning. We then begin to realize that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 138.

God gives sufficient light and evidence to enable man to distinguish truth from error. But He does not force man to receive truth. He leaves him free to choose the good or to choose the evil. If man resists evidence that is sufficient to guide his judgment in the right direction, and chooses evil once, he will do this more readily the second time. The third time he will still more eagerly withdraw himself from God and choose to stand on the side of Satan. And in this course he will continue until he is confirmed in evil, and believes the lie he has cherished as truth. His resistance has produced its harvest. . . .

The choice we make in this life will be our choice through all eternity. We shall receive either eternal life or eternal death. There is no middle ground, no second probation. We are called upon to overcome in this life as Christ overcame. Heaven has provided us with abundant opportunities and privileges, so that we may overcome as Christ overcame, and sit down with Him on His throne. —*Ellen G. White Comments, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1112.*

[God's] word is pledged. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but His kindness shall not depart from His people, neither shall the covenant of His peace be removed. His voice is heard, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee" (Isaiah 54:8). How amazing is this love, that God condescends to remove all cause for doubt and questioning from human fears and weakness and takes hold of the trembling hand reached up to Him in faith; and He helps us to trust Him by multiplied assurances and securities. . . . He has confirmed His promise with an oath: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." What more could our Lord do to strengthen our faith in His promises? —*That I May Know Him, p. 262.*

God's Ideal and Remedial Wills

[In] England just before the time of Wesley . . . many affirmed that Christ had abolished the moral law and that Christians are therefore under no obligation to observe it; that a believer is freed from the "bondage of good works." . . .

Others, also holding that "the elect cannot fall from grace nor forfeit the divine favor," arrived at the still more hideous conclusion that "the wicked actions they commit are not really sinful, nor to be considered as instances of their violation of the divine law, and that, consequently, they have no occasion either to confess their sins or to break them off by repentance."—McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, art. "Antinomians." Therefore, they declared that even one of the vilest of sins, "considered universally an enormous violation of the divine law, is not a sin in the sight of God," if committed by one of the elect. . . .

These monstrous doctrines are . . . inspired by the same master spirit—by him who, even among the sinless inhabitants of heaven, began his work of seeking to break down the righteous restraints of the law of God. —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 260, 261.

The parable of the unfaithful husbandmen shows plainly that the Jews carried out their ambitious desires till the love and fear of God departed from them.

No one is to understand from this scripture that God arbitrarily blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of the Jews. It was Christ's work to soften hard hearts. But if men resisted the work of Christ, the sure result would be that their hearts would become hardened.

Christ quoted a prophecy which more than a thousand years before had predicted what God's foreknowledge had seen would be. The prophecies do not shape the characters of the men who fulfill them. Men act out their own free will, either in accordance with a character placed under the molding of God or a character placed under the harsh rule of Satan. —"Walk in the Light," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 13, 1900.

In the experience of the apostle John under persecution, there is a lesson of wonderful strength and comfort for the Christian. God does not prevent the plottings of wicked men, but He causes their devices to work for good to those who in trial and conflict maintain their faith and loyalty. Often the gospel laborer carries on his work amid storms of persecution, bitter opposition, and unjust reproach. At such times let him remember that the experience to be gained in the furnace of trial and affliction is worth all the pain it costs. Thus God brings His children near to Him, that He may show them their weakness and His strength. He teaches them to lean on Him. Thus He prepares them to meet emergencies, to fill positions of trust, and to accomplish the great purpose for which their powers were given them. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 574.

Christ Has Overcome the World

Christ knew that the enemy would come to every human being, to take advantage of hereditary weakness, and by his false insinuations to ensnare all whose trust is not in God. And by passing over the ground which man must travel, our Lord has prepared the way for us to overcome. It is not His will that we should be placed at a disadvantage in the conflict with Satan. He would not have us intimidated and discouraged by the assaults of the serpent. "Be of good cheer," He says; "I have overcome the world." John 16:33. . . .

By what means did He overcome in the conflict with Satan? By the word of God. Only by the word could He resist temptation. "It is written," He said. And unto us are given "exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." 2 Peter 1:4. Every promise in God's word is ours. . . . When assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All its strength is yours. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 122, 123.

"These things have I spoken unto you," the Saviour said, "that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). The work of overcoming is not a joyless work; no, indeed. It means communication with Heaven. You can go to God in prayer; you can ask, and receive; you can believe, hanging your helpless soul on Christ. It means that humanity can work the will and ways of God. Humanity and divinity are combined for this very purpose. . . .

He suffers the deep waters of affliction to go over our souls, in order that we may know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, in order that we may have deep heart longings to be cleansed from defilement, and may come forth from the trial purer, holier, happier. Often we enter the furnace of affliction with our souls darkened with selfishness; but if patient under the crucial test, we shall come forth reflecting the divine character. When His purpose in the affliction is accomplished "he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Psalm 37:6). —*In Heavenly Places*, p. 279.

The power of Christ is to be the comfort, the hope, the crown of rejoicing, of every one that follows Jesus in his conflict, in his struggles in life. He who truly follows the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, can shout as he advances, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

What kind of faith is it that overcomes the world? It is that faith which makes Christ your own personal Saviour—that faith which, recognizing your helplessness, your utter inability to save yourself, takes hold of the helper who is mighty to save, as your only hope. It is faith that will not be discouraged, that hears the voice of Christ saying, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, and my divine strength is yours." . . . "Lo, I am with you always." —*That I May Know Him*, p. 166.

Friday, February 21

For Further Reading

Testimonies for the Church, "Religion in the Daily Life," vol. 4, pp. 360–371;
Steps to Christ, "Rejoicing in the Lord," pp. 115–126.