

The Great Controversy

Chapter 33 - The First Great Deception Part 1

Church Worship Readings for:

May 3 - May 8

Why Family Worship?

Before leaving the house for labor, all the family should be called together; and the father, or the mother in the father's absence, should plead fervently with God to keep them through the day. Come in humility, with a heart full of tenderness, and with a sense of the temptations and dangers before yourselves and your children; by faith bind them upon the altar, entreating for them the care of the Lord. **Ministering angels will guard children who are thus dedicated to God.**

— *Testimonies For The Church* 1:397, 398

Like the patriarchs of old, those who profess to love God should erect an altar to the Lord wherever they pitch their tent.... Fathers and mothers should often lift up their hearts to God in humble supplication for themselves and their children. Let the father, as priest of the household, lay upon the altar of God the morning and evening sacrifice, while the wife and children unite in prayer and praise. **In such a household Jesus will love to tarry.**

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 144.

How to conduct a family worship

Expect a blessing. If you, as the parents, are excited about family worship, your children will be much more likely to enjoy it as well. Don't let any lack of enthusiasm change your spirits.

Family worship is simple and important for each member. It should be short, interesting/engaging, and Christ centered. Plan for no more than **15 minutes**. Don't be afraid to try. You may not get it perfect the first time. That's ok. Try again till you learn what works best for your family.

1. **Begin** with prayer
2. **Read** a short devotional thought (Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, or Bible story book).
3. **Discuss and Apply** what you just read.
 - Younger Children: think through short stories or interesting illustrations that will engage them.
 - Older children: Ask questions and briefly discuss what was read. Parents, this is when you will want to have prepared ahead.
 - How can you make the worship interesting and practical to your children.
 - How does this passage apply to their live? In what ways can it be brought into the real world.
4. **Close** with prayer.
 - This is when you ask God to forgive your family for their sins. Pray for His blessings and protection up each member.

Sunday's Reading

“Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

– Genesis 3:4-5

With the earliest history of man, Satan began his efforts to deceive our race. He who had incited rebellion in Heaven desired to bring the inhabitants of the earth to unite with him in his warfare against the government of God. Adam and Eve had been perfectly happy in obedience to the law of God, and this fact was a constant testimony against the claim which Satan had urged in Heaven, that God's law was oppressive, and opposed to the good of his creatures. And, furthermore, Satan's envy was excited as he looked upon the beautiful home prepared for the sinless pair. He determined to cause their fall, that, having separated them from God, and brought them under his own power, he might gain possession of the earth, and here establish his kingdom, in opposition to the Most High.

Had Satan revealed himself in his real character, he would have been repulsed at once, for Adam and Eve had been warned against this dangerous foe; but he worked in the dark, concealing his purpose, that he might more effectually accomplish his object. Employing as his medium the serpent, then a creature of fascinating appearance, he addressed himself to Eve, “Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” [Genesis 3:1.] Had Eve refrained from entering into argument with the tempter, she would have been safe; but she ventured to parley with him, and fell a victim to his wiles. It is thus that many are still overcome. They doubt and argue concerning the requirements of God, and instead of obeying the divine commands, they accept human theories, which but disguise the devices of Satan.

“The woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” [Genesis 3:2-5.] He declared that they would become like God, possessing greater wisdom than before, and being capable of a higher state of existence. Eve yielded to temptation; and through her influence, Adam was led into sin. They accepted the words of the serpent, that God did not mean what he said; they distrusted their Creator, and imagined that he was restricting their liberty, and that they might obtain great wisdom and exaltation by transgressing his law.

But what did Adam, after his sin, find to be the meaning of the words, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”? Did he find them to mean, as Satan had led him to believe, that he was to be ushered into a more exalted state of existence? Then indeed there was great good to be gained by transgression, and Satan was proved to be a benefactor of the race. But Adam did not find this to be the meaning of the divine sentence. God declared that as a penalty for his sin, man should return to the ground whence he was taken: “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” [Genesis 3:19.] The words of Satan, “Your eyes shall be opened,” proved to be true in this sense only: After Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, their eyes were opened to discern their folly; they did know evil, and they tasted the bitter fruit of transgression.

Monday's Reading

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

—John 3:36

In the midst of Eden grew the tree of life, whose fruit had the power of perpetuating life. Had Adam remained obedient to God, he would have continued to enjoy free access to this tree, and would have lived forever. But when he sinned, he was cut off from partaking of the tree of life, and he became subject to death. The divine sentence, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” points to the utter extinction of life.

Immortality, promised to man on condition of obedience, had been forfeited by transgression. Adam could not transmit to his posterity that which he did not possess; and there could have been no hope for the fallen race, had not God, by the sacrifice of his Son, brought immortality within their reach. While “death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” Christ “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” [Romans 5:12; 2 Timothy 1:10.] And only through Christ can immortality be obtained. Said Jesus, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.” [John 3:36.] Every man may come in possession of this priceless blessing if he will comply with the conditions. All “who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality,” will receive eternal life. [Romans 2:7.]

The only one who promised Adam life in disobedience was the great deceiver. And the declaration of the serpent to Eve in Eden,—“Ye shall not surely die,”—was the first sermon ever preached upon the immortality of the soul. Yet this declaration, resting solely upon the authority of Satan, is echoed from the pulpits of Christendom, and is received by the majority of mankind as readily as it was received by our first parents. The divine sentence, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” [Ezekiel 18:20.] is made to mean, The soul that sinneth, it shall not die, but live eternally. We cannot but wonder at the strange infatuation which renders men so credulous concerning the words of Satan, and so unbelieving in regard to the words of God.

Had man, after his fall, been allowed free access to the tree of life, he would have lived forever, and thus sin would have been immortalized. But cherubim and a flaming sword kept “the way of the tree of life,” [Genesis 3:24.] and not one of the family of Adam has been permitted to pass that barrier and partake of the life-giving fruit. Therefore there is not an immortal sinner.

But after the fall, Satan bade his angels make a special effort to inculcate the belief in man's natural immortality; and having induced the people to receive this error, they were to lead them on to conclude that the sinner would live in eternal misery. Now the prince of darkness, working through his agents, represents God as a revengeful tyrant, declaring that he plunges into hell all those who do not please him, and causes them ever to feel his wrath; and that while they suffer unutterable anguish, and writhe in the eternal flames, their Creator looks down upon them with satisfaction.

Thus the arch-fiend clothes with his own attributes the Creator and Benefactor of mankind. Cruelty is Satanic. God is love; and all that he created was pure, holy, and lovely, until sin was brought in by the first great rebel. Satan himself is the enemy who tempts man to sin, and then destroys him if he can; and when he has made sure of his victim, then he exults in the ruin he has wrought. If permitted, he would sweep the entire race into his net. Were it not for the interposition of divine power, not one son or daughter of Adam would escape.

Tuesday's Reading

"Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"

– Ezekiel 33:11

Satan is seeking to overcome men today, as he overcame our first parents, by shaking their confidence in their Creator, and leading them to doubt the wisdom of his government and the justice of his laws. Satan and his emissaries represent God as even worse than themselves, in order to justify their own malignity and rebellion. The great deceiver endeavors to shift his own horrible cruelty of character upon our heavenly Father, that he may cause himself to appear as one greatly wronged by his expulsion from Heaven because he would not submit to so unjust a governor. He presents before the world the liberty which they may enjoy under his mild sway, in contrast with the bondage imposed by the stern decrees of Jehovah. Thus he succeeds in luring souls away from their allegiance to God.

How repugnant to every emotion of love and mercy, and even to our sense of justice, is the doctrine that the wicked dead are tormented with fire and brimstone in an eternally burning hell; that for the sins of a brief, earthly life they are to suffer torture as long as God shall live. Yet this doctrine has been widely taught, and is still embodied in many of the creeds of Christendom. Said a learned doctor of divinity: "The sight of hell-torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever. When they see others who are of the same nature and born under the same circumstances, plunged in such misery, and they so distinguished, it will make them sensible of how happy they are." Another used these words: "While the decree of reprobation is eternally executing on the vessels of wrath, the smoke of their torment will be eternally ascending in view of the vessels of mercy, who, instead of taking the part of these miserable objects, will say, Amen, Alleluia! praise ye the Lord!"

Where, in the pages of God's Word, is such teaching to be found? Will the redeemed in Heaven be lost to all emotions of pity and compassion, and even to feelings of common humanity? Are these to be exchanged for the indifference of the stoic, or the cruelty of the savage?—No, no; such is not the teaching of the Book of God. Those who present the views expressed in the quotations given above may be learned and even honest men; but they are deluded by the sophistry of Satan. He leads them to misconstrue strong expressions of Scripture, giving to the language the coloring of bitterness and malignity which pertains to himself, but not to our Creator. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked

turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" [Ezekiel 33:11.]

What would be gained to God should we admit that he delights in witnessing unceasing tortures; that he is regaled with the groans and shrieks and imprecations of the suffering creatures whom he holds in the flames of hell? Can these horrid sounds be music in the ear of Infinite Love? It is urged that the infliction of endless misery upon the wicked would show God's hatred of sin as an evil which is ruinous to the peace and order of the universe. Oh, dreadful blasphemy! As if God's hatred of sin is the reason why he perpetuates sin. For, according to the teachings of these theologians, continued torture without hope of mercy maddens its wretched victims, and as they pour out their rage in curses and blasphemy, they are forever augmenting their load of guilt. God's glory is not enhanced by thus perpetuating continually increasing sin through ceaseless ages.

Wednesday's Reading

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

— John 3:16-17

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels.

The theory of eternal torment is one of the false doctrines that constitute the wine of the abominations of Babylon, of which she makes all nations drink. [Revelation 14:8; 17:2.] That ministers of Christ should have accepted this heresy and proclaimed it from the sacred desk, is indeed a mystery. They received it from Rome, as they received the false sabbath. True, it has been taught by great and good men; but the light on this subject had not come to them as it has come to us. They were responsible only for the light which shone in their time; we are accountable for that which shines in our day. If we turn from the testimony of God's Word, and accept false doctrines because our fathers taught them, we fall under the condemnation pronounced upon Babylon; we are drinking of the wine of her abominations.

A large class to whom the doctrine of eternal torment is revolting, are driven to the opposite error. They see that the Scriptures represent God as a being of love and compassion, and they cannot believe that he will consign his creatures to the fires of an eternally burning hell. But, holding that the soul is naturally immortal, they see no alternative but to conclude that all mankind will finally be saved. Many regard the threatenings of the Bible as designed merely to frighten men into obedience, and not to be literally fulfilled. Thus the sinner can live in selfish pleasure, disregarding the requirements of God, and yet expect to be finally received into his favor. Such a doctrine, presuming upon God's mercy, but ignoring his justice, pleases the carnal heart, and emboldens the wicked in their iniquity.

Thursday's Reading

“...[Paul's Epistles] in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”

– 2 Peter 3:16

To show how believers in universal salvation wrest the Scriptures to sustain their soul-destroying dogmas, it is needful only to cite their own utterances. At the funeral of an irreligious young man, who had been killed instantly by an accident, a Universalist minister selected as his text the Scripture statement concerning David, “He was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.” [2 Samuel 13:39.]

“I am frequently asked,” said the speaker, “what will be the fate of those who leave the world in sin, die, perhaps, in a state of inebriation, die with the scarlet stains of crime unwashed from their robes, or die as this young man died, having never made a profession or enjoyed an experience of religion. We are content with the Scriptures; their answer shall solve the awful problem. Amnon was exceedingly sinful; he was unrepentant, he was made drunk, and while drunk was killed. David was a prophet of God; he must have known whether it would be ill or well for Amnon in the world to come. What were the expressions of his heart?—‘The soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom; for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.’

“And what is the inference to be deduced from this language? Is it not that endless suffering formed no part of his religious belief?—So we conceive; and here we discover a triumphant argument in support of the more pleasing, more enlightened, more benevolent hypothesis of ultimate universal purity and peace. He was comforted, seeing his son was dead. And why so?—Because by the eye of prophecy he could look forward into the glorious future, and see that son far removed from all temptations, released from the bondage and purified from the corruptions of sin, and after being made sufficiently holy and enlightened, admitted to the assembly of ascended and rejoicing spirits. His only comfort was, that in being removed from the present state of sin and suffering, his beloved son had gone where the loftiest breathings of the Holy Spirit would be shed upon his darkened soul; where his mind would be unfolded to the wisdom of Heaven and the sweet raptures of immortal love, and thus prepared with a sanctified nature to enjoy the rest and society of the heavenly inheritance.

“In these thoughts we would be understood to believe that the salvation of Heaven depends upon nothing which we can do in this life; neither upon a

present change of heart, nor upon present belief, or a present profession of religion.

Thus does the professed minister of Christ reiterate the falsehood uttered by the serpent in Eden,—“Ye shall not surely die.” “In the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.” He declares that the vilest of sinners,—the murderer, the thief, and the adulterer, —will after death be prepared to enter into immortal bliss.

And from what does this perverter of the Scriptures draw his conclusions?—From a single sentence expressing David's submission to the dispensation of Providence. His soul “longed to go forth unto Absalom; for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.” The poignancy of his grief having been softened by time, his thoughts turned from the dead to the living son, self-banished through fear of the just punishment of his crime. And this is the evidence that the incestuous, drunken Amnon was at death immediately transported to the abodes of bliss, there to be purified and prepared for the companionship of sinless angels! A pleasing fable indeed, well suited to gratify the carnal heart! This is Satan's own doctrine, and it does his work effectually. Should we be surprised that, with such instruction, wickedness abounds?

The course pursued by this one false teacher illustrates that of many others. A few words of Scripture are separated from the context, which would, in many cases, show their meaning to be exactly opposite to the interpretation put upon them; and such disjointed passages are perverted and used in proof of doctrines that have no foundation in the Word of God. The testimony cited as evidence that the drunken Amnon is in Heaven, is a mere inference, directly contradicted by the plain and positive statement of the Scriptures, that no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God. [1 Corinthians 6:10.] It is thus that doubters, unbelievers, and skeptics turn the truth into a lie. And multitudes have been deceived by their sophistry, and rocked to sleep in the cradle of carnal security.

Friday's Reading

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."

—Revelation 22:14

If it were true that the souls of all men passed directly to Heaven at the hour of dissolution, then we might well covet death rather than life. Many have been led by this belief to put an end to their existence. When overwhelmed with trouble, perplexity, and disappointment, it seems an easy thing to break the brittle thread of life, and soar away into the bliss of the eternal world.

God has given in his Word decisive evidence that he will punish the transgressors of his law. Those who flatter themselves that he is too merciful to execute justice upon the sinner, have only to look to the cross of Calvary. The death of the spotless Son of God testifies that "the wages of sin is death," that every violation of God's law must receive its just retribution. Christ the sinless became sin for man. He bore the guilt of transgression, and the hiding of his Father's face, until his heart was broken and his life crushed out. All this sacrifice was made that sinners might be redeemed. In no other way could man be freed from the penalty of sin. And every soul that refuses to become a partaker of the atonement provided at such a cost, must bear, in his own person, the guilt and punishment of transgression.

Let us consider what the Bible teaches further concerning the ungodly and unrepentant, whom the Universalist places in Heaven as holy, happy angels.

"I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." [Revelation 21:6, 7.] This promise is only to those that thirst. None but those who feel their need of the water of life, and seek it at the loss of all things else, will be supplied. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." [Revelation 21:6, 7.] Here, also, conditions are specified. In order to inherit all things, we must resist and overcome sin.

The Lord declares by the prophet Isaiah, "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him." "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him." [Isaiah 3:10, 11.] "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times," says the wise man, "and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him; but it shall not be well with the wicked." [Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13.] And Paul testifies that the sinner is treasuring up unto himself "wrath against the day of

wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds;" "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." [Romans 2:5, 6, 9.]

"No fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, which is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." [Ephesians 5:5, Revised Version.] "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." [Hebrews 12:14.] "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." [Revelation 22:14, 15.]

God has given to men a declaration of his character, and of his method of dealing with sin. "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." [Exodus 34:6, 7.] "All the wicked will he destroy." "The transgressors shall be destroyed together; the end of the wicked shall be cut off." [Psalm 145:20; 37:38.] The power and authority of the divine government will be employed to put down rebellion; yet all the manifestations of retributive justice will be perfectly consistent with the character of God as a merciful, long-suffering, benevolent being.