

A misty forest path with tall trees and a ground covered in fallen leaves. The scene is dimly lit, with a blueish-grey mist filling the air. The trees are tall and thin, with their branches reaching up. The ground is covered in a thick layer of brown and orange fallen leaves. The overall mood is mysterious and somewhat somber.

The Great Controversy

Chapter 33 - The First Great Deception Part 2

Church Worship Readings for:

May 10 - May 15

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

“To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

– Acts 26:1

 God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of his hands shall love him because he is worthy of love. He would have them obey him because they have an intelligent appreciation of his wisdom, justice, and benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love him because they are drawn toward him in admiration of his attributes.

The principles of kindness, mercy, and love, taught and exemplified by our Saviour, are a transcript of the will and character of God. Christ declared that he taught nothing except that which he had received from his Father. The principles of the divine government are in perfect harmony with the Saviour's precept, “Love your enemies.” God executes justice upon the wicked, for the good of the universe, and even for the good of those upon whom his judgments are visited. He would make them happy if he could do so in accordance with the laws of his government and the justice of his character. He surrounds them with the tokens of his love, he grants them a knowledge of his law, and follows them with the offers of his mercy; but they despise his love, make void his law, and reject his mercy. While constantly receiving his gifts, they dishonor the Giver; they hate God because they know that he abhors their sins. The Lord bears long with their perversity; but the decisive hour will come at last, when their destiny is to be decided. Will he then chain these rebels to his side? Will he force them to do his will?

Those who have chosen Satan as their leader, and have been controlled by his power, are not prepared to enter the presence of God. Pride, deception, licentiousness, cruelty, have become fixed in their characters. Can they enter Heaven, to dwell forever with those whom they despised and hated on earth? Truth will never be agreeable to a liar; meekness will not satisfy self-esteem and pride; purity is not acceptable to the corrupt; disinterested love does not appear attractive to the selfish. What source of enjoyment could Heaven offer to those who are wholly absorbed in earthly and selfish interests?

Could those whose lives have been spent in rebellion against God be suddenly transported to Heaven, and witness the high, the holy state of perfection that ever exists there,—every soul filled with love; every countenance beaming with joy; enrapturing music in melodious strains rising in honor of God and the Lamb; and ceaseless streams of light flowing upon the redeemed from the face

of Him who sitteth upon the throne,—could those whose hearts are filled with hatred of God, of truth and holiness, mingle with the heavenly throng and join their songs of praise? Could they endure the glory of God and the Lamb?—No, no; years of probation were granted them, that they might form characters for Heaven; but they have never trained the mind to love purity; they have never learned the language of Heaven, and now it is too late. A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them for Heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire. They would long to flee from that holy place. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from Heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God.

Monday's Reading

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

—Romans 6:23

Like the waters of the flood, the fires of the great day declare God's verdict that the wicked are incurable. They have no disposition to submit to divine authority. Their will has been exercised in revolt; and when life is ended, it is too late to turn the current of their thoughts in the opposite direction,—too late to turn from transgression to obedience, from hatred to love.

In sparing the life of Cain the murderer, God gave the world an example of what would be the result of permitting the sinner to live, to continue a course of unbridled iniquity. Through the influence of Cain's teaching and example, multitudes of his descendants were led into sin, until "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." [Genesis 6:5, 11.]

In mercy to the world, God blotted out its wicked inhabitants in Noah's time. In mercy he destroyed the corrupt dwellers in Sodom. Through the deceptive power of Satan, the workers of iniquity obtain sympathy and admiration, and are thus constantly leading others to rebellion. It was so in Cain's and in Noah's day, and in the time of Abraham and Lot; it is so in our time. It is in mercy to the universe that God will finally destroy the rejecters of his grace.

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." [Romans 6:23.] While life is the inheritance of the righteous, death is the portion of the wicked. Moses declared to Israel, "I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil." [Deuteronomy 30:15.] The death referred to in these scriptures is not that pronounced upon Adam, for all mankind suffer the penalty of his transgression. It is the "second death" that is placed in contrast with everlasting life.

Tuesday's Reading

"All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

— John 5:28-29

In consequence of Adam's sin, death passed upon the whole human race. All alike go down into the grave. And through the provisions of the plan of salvation, all are to be brought forth from their graves. "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust;" [Acts 24:15.] "for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." [1 Corinthians 15:22.] But a distinction is made between the two classes that are brought forth. "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." [John 5:28, 29.] They who have been "accounted worthy" of the resurrection of life are "blessed and holy." "On such the second death hath no power." [Revelation 20:6.] But those who have not, through repentance and faith, secured pardon, must receive the penalty of transgression,—“the wages of sin.” They suffer punishment varying in duration and intensity, “according to their works,” but finally ending in the second death. Since it is impossible for God, consistently with his justice and mercy, to save the sinner in his sins, he deprives him of the existence which his transgressions have forfeited, and of which he has proved himself unworthy. Says an inspired writer, “Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.” And another declares, “They shall be as though they had not been.” [Psalm 37:10; Obadiah 16.] Covered with infamy, they sink into hopeless, eternal oblivion.

Thus will be made an end of sin, with all the woe and ruin which have resulted from it. Says the psalmist: “Thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name forever and ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end.” [Psalm 9:5, 6.] John, in the Revelation, looking forward to the eternal state, hears a universal anthem of praise, undisturbed by one note of discord. Every creature in Heaven and earth was heard ascribing glory to God. [Revelation 5:13.] There will then be no lost souls to blaspheme God, as they writhe in never-ending torment; no wretched beings in hell will mingle their shrieks with the songs of the saved.

Wednesday's Reading

"If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

– 1 Corinthians 15:16-18

Upon the fundamental error of natural immortality rests the doctrine of consciousness in death, a doctrine, like eternal torment, opposed to the teachings of the Scriptures, to the dictates of reason, and to our feelings of humanity. According to the popular belief, the redeemed in Heaven are acquainted with all that takes place on the earth, and especially with the lives of the friends whom they have left behind. But how could it be a source of happiness to the dead to know the troubles of the living, to witness the sins committed by their own loved ones, and to see them enduring all the sorrows, disappointments, and anguish of life? How much of Heaven's bliss would be enjoyed by those who were hovering over their friends on earth? And how utterly revolting is the belief that as soon as the breath leaves the body, the soul of the impenitent is consigned to the flames of hell! To what depths of anguish must those be plunged who see their friends passing to the grave unprepared, to enter upon an eternity of woe and sin! Many have been driven to insanity by this harrowing thought.

What say the Scriptures concerning these things? David declares that man is not conscious in death. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." [Psalm 146:4.] Solomon bears the same testimony: "The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything." "Their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun." "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." [Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10.]

When, in answer to his prayer, Hezekiah's life was prolonged fifteen years, the grateful king rendered to God a tribute of praise for his great mercy. In this song he tells the reason why he thus rejoices: "The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day." [Isaiah 38:18, 19.] Popular theology represents the righteous dead as in Heaven, entered into bliss, and praising God with an immortal tongue; but Hezekiah could see no such glorious prospect in death. With his words agrees the testimony of the psalmist: "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." [Psalm 6:5; 115:17]

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, declared that the patriarch David “is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.” “For David is not ascended into the heavens.” [Acts 2:29, 34.] The fact that David remains in the grave until the resurrection, proves that the righteous do not go to Heaven at death. It is only through the resurrection, and by virtue of the fact that Christ has risen, that David can at last sit at the right hand of God.

And said Paul: “If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” [1 Corinthians 15:16-18.] If for four thousand years the righteous had gone directly to Heaven at death, how could Paul have said that if there is no resurrection, “they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished”? No resurrection would be necessary.

The martyr Tyndale, defending the doctrine that the dead sleep, declared to his papist opponent: “Ye, in putting them [departed souls] in Heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the argument wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection.” “If the souls be in Heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?”

Thursday's Reading

"I go to prepare a place for you," he said. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself."

– Acts 26:1

It is an undeniable fact that the hope of immortal blessedness at death has led to widespread neglect of the Bible doctrine of the resurrection. This tendency was remarked by Dr. Adam Clarke, who, early in the present century, said: "The doctrine of the resurrection appears to have been thought of much more consequence among the primitive Christians than it is now! How is this? The apostles were continually insisting on it, and exciting the followers of God to diligence, obedience, and cheerfulness through it. And their successors in the present day seldom mention it! So apostles preached, and so primitive Christians believed; so we preach, and so our hearers believe. There is not a doctrine in the gospel on which more stress is laid; and there is not a doctrine in the present system of preaching which is treated with more neglect!"

This has continued until the glorious truth of the resurrection has been almost wholly obscured, and lost sight of by the Christian world. Thus a leading religious writer, commenting on the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, says: "For all practical purposes of comfort the doctrine of the blessed immortality of the righteous takes the place for us of any doubtful doctrine of the Lord's second coming. At our death the Lord comes for us. That is what we are to wait and watch for. The dead are already passed into glory. They do not wait for the trump for their judgment and blessedness."

But when about to leave his disciples, Jesus did not tell them that they would soon come to him. "I go to prepare a place for you," he said. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself." [John 14:2, 3.] And Paul tells us, further, that "the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." And he adds, "Comfort one another with these words." [1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.] How wide the contrast between these words of comfort and those of the Universalist minister previously quoted. The latter consoled the bereaved friends with the assurance, that, however sinful the dead might have been, when he breathed out his life here he was to be received among the angels. Paul points his brethren to the future coming of the Lord, when the fetters of the tomb shall be broken, and the "dead in Christ" shall be raised to eternal life.

Friday's Reading

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

– 1 Corinthians 15:52

Before any can enter the mansions of the blest, their cases must be investigated, and their characters and their deeds must pass in review before God. All are to be judged according to the things written in the books, and to be rewarded as their works have been. This Judgment does not take place at death. Mark the words of Paul: "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." [Acts 17:31.] Here the apostle plainly stated that a specified time, then future, had been fixed upon for the Judgment of the world.

Jude refers to the same period: "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the Judgment of the great day." And again he quotes the words of Enoch: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." [Jude 6, 14, 15.] John declares that he "saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened;" "and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books." [Revelation 20:12.]

But if the dead are already enjoying the bliss of Heaven or writhing in the flames of hell, what need of a future Judgment? The teachings of God's Word on these important points are neither obscure nor contradictory; they may be understood by common minds. But what candid mind can see either wisdom or justice in the current theory? Will the righteous, after the investigation of their cases at the Judgment, receive the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant," "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," [Matthew 25:21, 41.] when they have been dwelling in his presence, perhaps for long ages? Are the wicked summoned from the place of torment to receive the sentence from the Judge of all the earth, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire?" [Matthew 25:21, 41.] Oh, solemn mockery! shameful impeachment of the wisdom and justice of God!

The theory of the immortality of the soul was one of those false doctrines that Rome, borrowing from paganism, incorporated into the religion of Christendom. Martin Luther classed it with "the numberless prodigies of the Romish dunghill of decretals." Commenting on the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes, that the dead know not anything, the reformer says: "Another proof that the dead are insensible. Solomon thinks therefore, that the dead are

altogether asleep, and think of nothing. They lie, not reckoning days or years, but when awakened, will seem to themselves to have slept scarcely a moment.”

Nowhere in the Sacred Scriptures is found the statement that the righteous go to their reward or the wicked to their punishment at death. The patriarchs and prophets have left no such assurance. Christ and his apostles have given no hint of it. The Bible clearly teaches that the dead do not go immediately to Heaven. They are represented as sleeping until the resurrection. [1 Thessalonians 4:14; Job 14:10-12.] In the very day when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl broken, [Ecclesiastes 12:6.] man's thoughts perish. They that go down to the grave are in silence. They know no more of anything that is done under the sun. [Job 14:21.] Blessed rest for the weary righteous! Time, be it long or short, is but a moment to them. They sleep, they are awakened by the trump of God to a glorious immortality. “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.... So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” [1 Corinthians 15:52-55.] As they are called forth from their deep slumber, they begin to think just where they ceased. The last sensation was the pang of death, the last thought that they were falling beneath the power of the grave. When they arise from the tomb, their first glad thought will be echoed in the triumphal shout, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” [1 Corinthians 15:52-55.]