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Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

Third Quarter.

Lesson XI. September 11. Matt. 7:1-12.

GOLDEN PRECEPTS.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them—Matt. 7:12.

I. Judging Others. 1. *Judge not.* Be not censorious, do not assume the right to find fault with others, and unjustly and falsely condemn them. *That ye be not judged* by others, as you have judged them.

2. *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.* Your own standard will be applied to yourself. Those who are worst themselves are most severe in their judgments of sins differing from their own. *And with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* That is probably the amplification of a general principle (see Mark 4:24; Luke 6:38.)

II. The Mote and the Beam. 3. *Why beholdest thou* (observest, starest at) *the mote that is in thy brother's eye?* The censorious man, or fault-finder, fixes his eyes, as it were staringly, on the mote that is in his brother's eye, as if he were sympathizingly sorry for him. *Mote*, or little speck of straw, chaff, or wood. No doubt there is such a mote in thy brother's eye. Every man has his failing. *But considerest not.* A much stronger word than beholdest. Our own faults require the careful scrutiny which we never give them; the faults of others we should be content to glance at. *The beam that is in thine own eye. Beam*, a graphic and almost droll representation of a comparatively great fault. The word means a log, joist, or rafter. It is implied that the censorious judge or fault-finder is, to the eye of the candid onlooker, himself characterized by some greater fault than the person whose fault he is taking such zest in pointing out.

4. *Or how wilt thou say to thy brother*, etc. How can you have the face to say, how be guilty of such hypocrisy, such absurdity? *And behold, a beam is in thine own eye.* "Reflect," say Seneca, "that perhaps the fault of which you complain, may, on examination, be found in yourself."

5. *Thou hypocrite.* Because he professes to be sorry for the faults he reproves, when he is not. He rejoices to find a sin in his brother to find fault with. The truly good man is never censorious. He rebukes his brother, but always with genuine grief. *First cast out the beam out of thine own eye.* Leave off your own faults first; get rid of your own unchristian spirit. No one can rightfully or successfully help others to escape from sin who does not at least with earnest sincerity, try to overcome his own faults and sins. *Then shalt thou see clearly.* With eye purified by sincerity, with true, undistorted vision. *To cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.* Here is a higher motive for overcoming our own faults, because thus we may successfully aid in the reformation of the world.

III. Pearls Before Swine. 6. Harsh judgment and unwise correction of others were reproved (vers. 1-5); now comes a warning against laxity of judgment, childish ignorance of men. *Give not that which is holy.* The sacrificial meats, the holy things prepared for the temple services, to aid men in the worship of God. *Unto the dogs.* In the East dogs are savage, unclean ceremonially, and actually filthy and horrible in appearance. They are the scavengers of the cities, and feed upon all the refuse, even when it is far gone in putrefaction. To cast the sacrificial flesh to the dogs would be first putting it on a level with the offal of the shambles, or with that which is cast out as abominable filth, and then giving it over to the charge of abominable beasts. To give holy things to dogs will not elevate the dogs, but only defile the holy things. *Neither cast ye pearls before swine.* Because they cannot appreciate their beauty, nor understand their value, and you lose your pearls. You must change the nature of the swine before the pearls will do them any good. *Lest they turn again and rend you.* You not only will fail of doing them any good, but they will injure you for your attempt.

IV. Asking and Receiving. Jesus has been discoursing of the principles of the kingdom of heaven, not easy to be attained in practice. He now tells us where we may obtain the necessary help.

7. *Ask, seek, knock.* The three words imply distinct degrees of intensity. There is the "asking" in the spoken words of prayer, the "seeking" in the efforts and labors which are acted prayers, the "knocking" at the gate with the urgent importunity which claims admission into our Father's house. *Ask and it SHALL be given you; seek, and ye SHALL find.* Was a divine promise ever broken or forgotten? I believe Christian people themselves do not duly weigh the affront of distrusting God's pledges. *Knock, and it SHALL be opened unto you.* Knocking implies importunity, that will not be denied. Seeking may be anywhere; but we knock at the door of One who has treasures, character, goodness, to obtain from him the help no mere seeking of our own can give.

The Answer. There are three ways in which prayers are answered. (1) In the praying itself is an answer, the communion with God that comes through prayer; but this cannot come without another answer. (2) There is a giving of the exact thing we ask for, in all cases where direct promises are made, or where it would be good for us to receive it; but not always in the way, or at the time, we may set. (3) As many times the exact thing we ask for, in the form we ask for it, would be the worst thing for us, and what we really do not want; therefore, in such cases God gives us the *spirit* of our prayer, what we really would have asked for had we known all things, as he does. A child asks for a white powder he sees, thinking it sugar, when in reality it is poison. The parent refuses the poison, and gives real sugar instead. He, not in a literal form, but a thousand times more really, gives what the child asks for. So does God with us, and so at last when we shall see that "every true prayer is really answered."

8. *For every one that asketh*, etc. The promise is repeated to make certainty more certain. Every prayer in which the asking, seeking, and knocking are combined is answered.

9. *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread.* The love of sinful men to their children is here contrasted with that of God. *Will he give him a stone?* Less than he asks and poorer, something he does not need. God may do more for us than we ask or think; but never less. *If* we ask a stone, thinking it bread, God will give us the bread and not the stone.

10. *Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?* Like it, indeed, but only to sting him.

11. *If ye, then, being evil*, i. e., sinful, imperfect. Even in our highest, holiest relations there is evil; selfishness is mingled with our most unselfish love. *Good gifts unto your children.* This is the rule. *How much more.* The difference is infinite. *Shall your Father which is in heaven.* The holy, heavenly, loving, perfect Father, who makes heaven what it is, who is able to answer every prayer. *Give good things.* Luke 11:13, "the Holy Spirit," which is the best of the "good things": he who receives the Holy Spirit may expect all the rest, as far as "good" for him. God gives good gifts only, and what he gives is always good. The argument is conclusive. If God does not answer prayer, and if what he gives us in response to our asking is not the best for us, then God is not as good as an earthly parent.

V. The Golden Rule. 12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you.* These practical counsels are naturally concluded and summed up by this "Golden Rule." (1) It presents God's benevolence as the guide of duty. (2) Hence it is positive ("Do all the good you can to your neighbor"), not negative (as in the Rabbinical sentence, "Do not to your neighbor what is odious to you, for this is the whole law"). (3) It is taught by One who wrought as well as taught righteousness, who died that we might even so do also. *For this is the law and the prophets.* This is the sum of the duties to man which they command.

What Made the Difference.

"Where's Ted? Send him for it."

"He's gone to my house to get some twine. I'll tell him as soon as he comes back. Here he comes. Ted, run over to Mrs. Lindsay's and ask for her scissors! Be quick now."

The boy's bright face clouded as he laid down the ball of twine, and he lingered reluctantly until a second peremptory command made him start on his errand.

"I never saw such a disobliging boy," exclaimed Mrs. Lindsay, as she marked his evident unwillingness, and all of the little group, with one exception, agreed with her.

They were preparing the decorations for the church for a Sunday-school anniversary, and when early in the afternoon Ted, with a boy's love to see what was going on, made his appearance at the church door, he was immediately pressed into service as an errand-boy, and had been kept busy running to the various houses for articles that had been forgotten.

"This isn't any fun," he murmured to himself as he went slowly on his last errand, feeling a strong desire to go home instead of returning to the church. "They never seem to think that I'm tired, and would like to wait a minute, and see the stars and things they are making. They never even said 'thank you' to me once after all I've done.

He would have been pleased if he had known that he had one champion in the group of ladies.

"I think Ted has been very obliging," quietly said a lady, a new-comer in the neighborhood, as she heard the freely expressed opinion of those around her concerning Ted. "He has been running errands all the afternoon, and I know he was very anxious to stay here and watch our work."

"Running errands is all that a boy is good for," laughingly answered the lady to whom she had addressed herself, and she voiced the opinion of the others.

Ted came leisurely back from his errand, and received the remonstrance for his tardiness with an injured expression on his face.

He had made up his mind to promptly decline being sent on any more errands, but he did not have an opportunity for some time to put his resolution into practice. He had forgotten his momentary ill-humor in his interest in watching the work which grew rapidly beneath the skilled fingers of the ladies. Mrs Mortimer, the lady who had so warmly espoused his cause, was making a wreath of evergreen, when the ball of twine came to an abrupt conclusion just as her work was nearly finished.

"Isn't that too bad!" exclaimed Ted, who stood beside her, watching her deft fingers. "Maybe I have got a piece in my pocket."

A hasty search in his many pockets brought to light everything that is usually contained in such receptacles except the desired twine.

"Ted, are you too tired to do me a favor?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, when she found that she could not complete her work without the twine.

"No'm," answered Ted promptly, quite forgetting his determination not to do any more errands.

"Will you be kind enough to go to my house and ask for a ball of twine that is in my work-basket? I am sorry to ask you to go, but I am so anxious to finish this wreath before we go home, for then everything will be done."

"I'd just as lief go as not, and it won't take me half a minute," answered Ted, darting away with an eagerness that made the other ladies look around in surprise.

In a short time he returned, breathless with haste, and placed the ball in Mrs. Mortimer's hand.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Ted," she said, as she took it.

"Not at all," returned Ted, blushing up to the roots of his curly hair with his effort at politeness.

"Well, Ted, I must say that I never knew you to be so obliging before," exclaimed one of the ladies. "You aren't generally so polite."

"It ain't often any one is polite to me, and that's why," retorted Ted, as he helped Mrs. Mortimer gather up the little pieces of evergreen, which had dropped from the wreath, willing to assist anyone who had "treated him like somebody," as he mentally phrased it.

"So that's what made the difference in Ted, is it?" queried Mrs. Lindsay, as the ladies walked down the street together, and Ted vanished around the corner.

"I think you will find that it makes a great difference with any boy's willingness to be of use," answered Mrs. Mortimer with a smile. "My experience with boys has always been that, if they are treated as gentlemen, they will behave as gentlemen. If a boy's services are demanded as a matter of course, and no acknowledgment is made of any favour, naturely he will not care to have innumerable duties imposed upon him merely because he is a boy, but if asked to do anything with the same courtesy with which you would ask a gentleman to render you the same service, you will find that he will suddenly develop the chivalry which is latent in every boy's heart, and gladly assist you. Try it and see for yourself, if you doubt the truth of my theory," she added, as she saw an incredulous smile on the faces of some of her auditors.

And to every one else I would like to say "Try it." Don't think that politeness and courtesy are wasted on a boy. He will appreciate them, and respond to such treatment just as readily as when he is years older, and it will make a noticeable difference in his readiness to be of service when his help is desired. Try it!—*Minnie E. Kenney, in the Presbyterian Observer.*

The Seed.

In Heb. 2:16. the word "take hold" is the same word employed in the saving of Peter where the Lord "caught" him. As in that case, so after the degeneration of the flesh, Jesus Christ caught hold of the seed of Abraham, that he might rescue it, yet not by the outward, but by the inward grasp. "Just as my brain lies hold of my body with its nerves and cells, grasps and sways and controls my body, so Jesus Christ became the brain of Christianity, and lifted it up. Paul says that the law is weak, after he had said that the law is holy and to be obeyed. The answer to the difficulty is that the law is weak through he flesh, not by itself. In the same way a horse would be weak through a rotten harness. The place where it is weak is the place to be mended, and Christ came into the world to mend humanity just where it broke. If a drowning man's hands are paralyzed that he cannot grasp a cable flung down to him he is drowned. We don't need a stronger rope, we need stronger hands. Christ came that he might be able in our flesh to say no to the temptation where we had not been able, and to say yes to the commandment where we could not. The difference between Sinai and Bethlehem is that on Sinai, God came down to humanity, while at Bethlehem he came to humanity.

Christ knew how to let go as well as how to hold on. He let go of the equality of God, that he might take hold of on the weakness of humanity. The great difficulty in this world is that of getting men to let go of their attainments. But Christ let go of riches and honor. It is wonderful that he should become incarnate, but thrice wonderful that he should identify himself to be incarnate; it is wonderful that he should become a servant, but thrice wonderful that he should renounce his sovereignty to become a servant. As an illustration of this point, Dr. Gordon told of the incident in Napoleon's life, where he took a sleeping sentinel's place for two hours, instead of punishing him. There was not a private in the army who could have done it. It is not impossible for God himself to do this; it was he who took our places, that he might take us up to his own and our nature into glory. —*Dr. Gordon.*

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