

## ☛ Sunday School. ☛

### Paul's Message to the Ephesians— Eph. 2: 1-19.

LESSON FOR MARCH 22, 1903.

About five years after the incident related in our last lesson Paul, now a prisoner at Rome, wrote a letter to the Ephesian Christians, which we shall find peculiarly interesting just at this point. We shall find the cream of it in the verses which have been selected for our lesson.

#### THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

Here are two pictures. The first is the picture of a youth walking in the way of death. We call it the way of death because it is the way of sin, and those of us who have watched the progress of sin in any life know that all the tendency of sin is to kill; that it is the one mighty destroyer; that it never brings forth anything but death. See him doing everything that his bad companions want him to do. See how he is led every moment by the will of Satan. Is there anything in that boy's nature that will change his course? If no influence, no power comes to him from without, will he not inevitably go down, down, down, until he reaches the pit? But, look! There is another picture. There is that boy, now a young man, walking on another road. It is the way of life. And notice that he is no longer with Satan, but with Christ. He is in heavenly places—his life is full of heavenly experiences. Note the change in his thoughts, his desires, his movements. What has brought about the wonderful transformation? Who should have the glory of it? How did that boy go from the road of death to the road of life? The answer is before us, not by his own strength, but by the drawing love of our Lord. And why did God exert his love for that boy? Not because of any good in him, but because of the grace that was in God. It was all a matter of mercy which the boy did not merit. God out of love for him sent his Son into the world that the boy who believed in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

And God is so rich in this one thing we call grace, that there is enough for every one of us. He comes to you and to me just as he came to that boy. But he comes to draw us out of the depths by his love and not by force. We are dead in sin, but not dead in the sense that we cannot turn our backs upon the proffered mercy.

If my salvation depends upon myself, then I am of all men most miserable, for I will never be able to lift myself out of this bondage of sin into that highway of light and liberty in which I shall be with Christ. But if my salvation depends upon the mercy of God, and I am ready now, to accept his mercy, then I am happy indeed. For I know his mercy is sufficient.

#### ONE WAY TO TEACH THE LESSON.

I would not attempt to give a general view of the whole epistle: it is too difficult to be intelligently presented to the average class in a single lesson. The lesson text contains the heart of the matter, and we can well afford to confine ourselves to that.

I would begin by reminding the pupils that although we have here what appears to be at a glance an incomprehensible theological discussion, if we will clear away the obscure phraseology we shall find two clearly drawn pictures which they can readily grasp, and in which they will be deeply interested. In the eyes of Paul mankind is divided into two classes. These two classes are walking in two different roads. One is the way of death, the other the way of life. Let us look first at this picture of the way, or road, of death. Notice that the

people who walk in it are dead. In what sense are they dead? By whose will are they guided? Who is the prince? In what sense is he a prince? Note that it is his spirit that dwells in the disobedient. Note that this road of death is the road in which men walk from the beginning; that it is according to their nature to walk in it. Picture a child walking in this road, a bright boy, for example, (see Heart of the Lesson). Now ask the question, can we hope that this boy will ever change his course? Can he change it, simply by his own will-power? Can he say, "I am done with sin and I am going to walk a different road," and will that be enough? Look at him again. See how weak he is. See how easily he is led into every form of sin. Is not this boy's salvation a hopeless case if it depends simply upon his poor weak will? He is dead in sin. Is there any power in him to raise himself to the life of the Spirit?

Now look at the other road—the way of life. Notice that the boy we watched walking in the other road is now walking in this new road. Note the points of difference in the boy's thoughts, feelings and actions. Note that while he once lived according to the will of Satan, who was then his companion, he now lives according to the will of Christ, who is his present companion. Note that while he once sat in sinful places; that while his life was crowded with low, sinful experiences, he now sits with Christ in heavenly places; that his life is full of heavenly experiences. How was that boy raised from the low road of death to this new way of life? Picture God in Christ coming down into the world, presenting himself at the door of that boy's heart, offering to be his Savior, to be his resurrection and life, to raise his dead spirit to life again, and to make a new creature of him. Picture this boy, conscious of the deadness of his spiritual nature and of his utter helplessness, opening the door of his heart to the heavenly guest and saying, "Lord, I can never save myself, but thou shalt have my heart, my very life—thou shalt have me, to carry me where it pleases thee, to do with me as it pleases thee, and I will trust thee to save me."

Now ask why God came to that boy's heart? Why does he present himself at the door of all our hearts? Look into your own heart a moment. Can you see any good thing in it to attract God? Can you see that God is under any obligation to come and save that boy, or to save you? What is the secret? It is one word: grace. Repeat it over and over, and then get the pupils to define it. Remember it isn't mercy, merely, but it is unmerited mercy. It is the mercy that one shows to another who does not deserve mercy. Most of us are rich in mere mercy—that feeling which we have for those who deserve mercy—but God is rich in grace—that mercy which one has for those who do not deserve mercy. It was by the grace of God and not because of the natural goodness of that boy, or any good works that he did, that God reached down and lifted him up into the new life. But it is the grace of God which saves us and not our own good works, we are not, therefore, to think that we have nothing to do with our own salvation. Mercy comes and offers to save us, and while we are in sin, we are not dead in the sense that we are unable to accept or refuse the offer. Mercy stands before the door of our

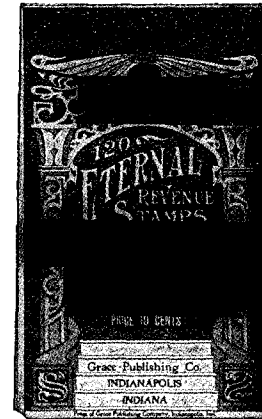
hearts, but mercy will not break down that door. Note again that if we could save ourselves by our own deeds, all the glory would belong to us, whereas all the glory must belong to God, for we are God's workmanship. And note, too, that while God did not plan that we should save ourselves by good works, he did plan to lift us out of the death of sin to the life of righteousness that we might do good works. Are you and I living according to this great plan? Finally, are you and I ever discouraged about our salvation? If we had to depend upon our own weak arms we might, indeed, despair, but if we depend upon God's grace, we may be happy, because we know that his mercy endureth forever.—Pell's Notes.

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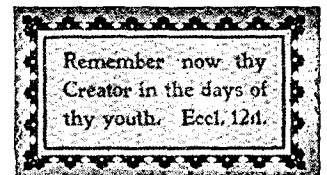
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