

Bible Studies for Adventists



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April 18–24, 2009

Commentary on “Life”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, April 18, 2009

Introduction

The student is reminded of the quality of our physical life. The goal is to know that life comes from God alone and for each person to experience the transformation that occurs when Christ enters their life. We are reminded that his presence should shape our daily choices. It is stated that we are obligated to take care of our lives, both physically and spiritually, and that as believers, we have become part of a family both in heaven and on earth.

The memory verse for this week is:

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10 KJV).

Problems

The first issue that should have been addressed before launching into this topic is; What does the Bible mean when it talks about "life". The memory verse mentions having life "to the full" or "more abundantly". If we read on down to verses 28 and 29, we see that this is life that is "eternal" and that those who have this life "shall never perish". Clearly, Jesus is talking about something much more than our physical life because our physical bodies are subject to death and those who possess this abundant life shall never perish.

Now, let's back up to the beginning of the chapter. The first eight verses tells the parable of the sheepfold, the door and the sheep. Jesus then explains the application of this parable:

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture (John 10:9 KJV).

Jesus is the door of our salvation. When we enter into his sheepfold we shall be saved. So, when we read verse ten, we are to understand that this abundant life we now have is exceedingly more than the physical life we already have. The "eternal" and "shall never perish" found in verses 28 and 29 gives it a fuller meaning. When we are in God's sheepfold we have nothing to fear from physical death. See Romans Chapter Eight. Can anything or anyone separate us from the love of God?

The next thing in this lesson that should be noted is that the Bible speaks of the human race as being in the image of God, with a physical body, a soul and a spirit. Yet, this lesson covers such secondary topics as physical education and our social life without stressing the importance of our soul. To say the soul includes our minds misses the point because even animals have a brain. As such, this lesson fails to set us apart from the animal kingdom.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26,27 KJV).

In addition to his physical body, Adam received a soul and a spirit. That is what set him apart from the animal kingdom. Put another way, our minds function differently from animals because of our soul and covering this topic would have been important to do in this lesson.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Ps. 42:1,2 ESV)

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (Romans 8:14-16 KJV)

The third issue has to do with the priorities of our physical life. While it is important to take care of our physical needs along with the rest of our being why place it on an equal footing with our spiritual needs when the Bible clearly does not do so? Mark Chapter Seven, especially verse 15, teaches us that what goes into the mouth does not defile. What comes out of the mouth from our hearts is what we are to be concerned with because that is what defiles the body. We should place our focus on what the Bible teaches.

Summary

1. The parable of the Sheepfold teaches us that we are eternally secure because of who our Good Shepherd is.
2. Our security is not because of anything we do, but because our Shepherd, who laid down his life for us, protects and safeguards us.
3. Our duty is simply to 'eat the spiritual food' in the pastures that he provides.

Day 2: Sunday, April 19, 2009

The Gift of Physical Life

This lesson focuses on the debate of the origin of the universe and the source of all life with primary concern given to our physical life.

Problems

Within creationist circles, this is not a very controversial topic. However, there are some secondary points of concern:

By focusing on the physical, not enough attention is given to the fact that God created man in his image with both a soul and a spirit, along with the physical. This would have been an excellent time, within the body of the lesson, to point out that we died spiritually the instant sin entered into the human race with the resulting sickness and death of our physical bodies that followed. The key to our physical lives is to accept the gospel message of Jesus Christ and receive the restoration of our spiritual union with God.

While the following passage is directed towards having money, it includes the thought that our focus should be on seeking righteousness instead of being centered on our physical needs.

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 'For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 'But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt. 6:31-33 ESV).

In the introduction, the statement is made that those who believe in God as the Creator; "do not have all the answers either". Knowing that God is the one who is our Creator is an answer, even for the things we can not know. Knowing how God did certain things may be a mystery but the results are clearly evident.

The lesson summary, with reference to Jesus speaking to Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), asks the student to "start each day reborn in Christ". Since this lesson is about our physical life and the rebirth Jesus is talking about concerns our spiritual life, one has to wonder what the author is talking about. Furthermore, our spiritual birth occurs once and is not something that happens each day when we awaken. We will come back to this topic more on Tuesday.

Summary

1. The Bible teaches us to seek righteousness and not focus on our physical needs.
2. Certainly, it is OK to make appropriate provision for these needs.
3. But having done so, leave the ultimate plans and concerns of the unknowable in God's hands.

Day 3: Monday, April 20, 2009

Physical Education

The point is made in this lesson that since we owe our existence to our Creator, we have a responsibility to be careful with what he has entrusted to us, with special attention given to our physical health.

Problems

The lesson introduction make reference to the Hebrew "instructions about healthful eating". Yet, when we turn to the appropriate passages, we find a different purpose given for these 'health' rules:

But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine (Lev. 20:24-26).

It is not about good health or "physical education", it is about separation from the pagan people around them. Keeping in mind the words of Lev. 20:24-25, consider the following well known vision of Peter's:

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common (Acts 10:10-15 KJV).

Clearly, the message of the vision was in direct reference to the command given to the Hebrew people found in the Leviticus passage. Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean. Therefore, the sign of the Hebrew separation from them concerning unclean foods did not apply to Christians, especially Gentiles.

If you introduce the Biblical message that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and use that as a motive for healthful living doctrine, consider the following verse:

There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man (Mark 7:15 KJV).

Certainly we are not to defile the temple of the Holy Spirit, but what does that have to do with externals such as the food we eat?

Now let's take a look at another phrase used in the lesson; "Jesus' understanding of religion was very much practice-oriented". Jesus, being the source of all knowledge, possesses far more than an "understanding". Religion is a man made attempt to reach God. Jesus is God and he came to us, not the other way around. He brings us the 'Word of life'. The phrase "practice-oriented" sounds like a back door way of introducing our 'works' into the theme of the life that Jesus gives us. The gospel message focuses on the fact that we were once dead in our sins and that we desperately need the righteousness that Jesus imputes into our lives when we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Our good practices are a result of his righteousness and are really the works that he produces in our lives.

Summary

1. While Jesus certainly cares for all our needs including our good physical health, he focuses on the ROOT CAUSE of our problems, not the results or secondary symptoms.
2. Sin causes sickness and death and that is what, above all else, needs to be addressed.
3. As said before, we need to be born again...spiritually. This is the topic of tomorrows lesson.

Day 4: Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Spiritual Life

In today's lesson the question is ask; What is our understanding of the following verse?

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (II Cor. 5:17 KJV).

The point is then made that sin has introduced decay and death to all life on this planet and refers to the "new birth" (of a Christian) where the "old person" dies and a "new person" is born with John Chapter Three as assigned reading. Finally, the author asks how you would respond to the question, "Have you been born-again?"

Problems

On the topic of "sufferings of this present time", the Bible teaches that all of creation, not just life on this planet, is under the bondage of sin:

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now (Romans 8:22 KJV).

The effects of sin has polluted far more than just life here on this planet.

The primary defect in today's lesson is that it is titled "Spiritual Life", yet leaves us to speculate on our own concerning what this spiritual life is about. So, if you would turn to John Chapter Three and begin at verse one we will rectify that oversight:

Commentary on John Chapter Three, Verses 1-21

- Verses 1,2** Jesus is a teacher from God. In other words, he is God and speaks with full ultimate authority.
- Verse 3** You must be born again to enter God's kingdom. Jesus is clearly speaking of our salvation.
- Verses 4-6** Jesus calls this our "spiritual birth". Because of our sin nature our spirit is dead, it needs life.
- Verses 7,8** The spirit is like the wind. You can not see it but you do see the effects of what it does.
- Verses 9-13** This is heavenly sourced knowledge. We can not learn this through human logic.
- Verses 14,15** Jesus paid sins penalty so that he has authority to send the Holy Spirit and bring life to our spirit.
- Verses 16,17** Because of what Jesus did, the world has the opportunity to be saved and all are without excuse.
- Verse 18** He who believes Jesus is no longer condemned. They have salvation and are saved.
- Verses 19,20** The world hates light and avoids truth, therefore it is condemned.
- Verse 21** Those who respond to the truth of the light are not condemned.

What Jesus is saying is that when we have our physical birth we are dead spiritually and we need another birth, a spiritual birth to be fully and truly alive.

In the Teachers comments related to this lesson, reference is made to Ps. 139:13,14 where speculation is made concerning what the Bible means about how God formed us in the depths of the earth. To get a better understanding we should read on to at least verse sixteen. The Bible text doesn't say the "human fetus" was formed in the depths of the earth. What it says is "inward parts" which is the essence of who we are. The lesson author then makes reference to our physical and spiritual self, ignoring the fact that we are born dead spiritually. King David, on the other hand, specifically mentions his soul. Physically, we are formed in our mother's womb. Spiritually we are not alive at our physical birth. Since David mentions his soul, why not keep it simple and conclude that is what he is talking about? Our soul, the essence of human life made in the image of God and is what he forms 'in the depths of the earth'.

Summary

1. When our spirit is made alive by God's Spirit, we enter God's kingdom and we are no longer condemned. This is central to the gospel message of Jesus Christ and our salvation.
2. Therefore it is vital to have a clear and truthful understanding of the condition of our spirit and the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The destiny of our souls is at stake.
3. Our walk with Jesus is a result of the changed condition of our spirit when Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to bring life to our spirit. This is the new birth or being "born again".

Day 5: Wednesday, April 22, 2009

Social Life

We live our lives on many social levels which include such things as; marriage, family, friendship, employment, community and Christian fellowship. Nobody, no matter how isolated they may be, conducts their lives without some form of interaction and cooperation with others. The Bible has much to say on how we are to relate and interact with others.

Problems

For the most part, the points being made in this lesson are good. However, this would be an appropriate time to cover several things that has been overlooked or simply have not been fully developed.

First, let's look at the following passage, where the Scribe asks Jesus which is the greatest or most important command:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30,31 KJV).

Now, notice how Jesus responds to the Scribe in the next passage:

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question (Mark 12:32-34 KJV).

The scribe was very close but not quite in the kingdom of God. He understood these two commands, yet there was something missing in his life. We have already learned in yesterday's lesson what this was. We know that what he lacked was the need to be 'born again'. With a living and regenerated spirit, he could enter the kingdom of God.

As for the apparent concern, in this lesson, about wanting to know why Adventist's loose their non-Adventist friends over a period a time, a better question would be to ask why Adventist shun non-Adventist friendships, even though many people they know obviously love the Lord but simply worship in other fellowships? And, why do Adventist make a point of not wanting to know why so many former Adventist have done nothing more than reject the unique Adventist teachings that they now understand to be unscriptural?

Our loyalty to Jesus Christ should be paramount and translate into a desire to lead others into the kingdom of God. The outworking of our social relationships should reflect this desire and have nothing to do with the denomination we join for fellowship.

Summary

1. A well balanced and healthy social life should be founded upon the 'two greatest commands'.
2. Our love for God and love others should be the foundation undergirding our motives and behavior in all our social relationships.

Day 6: Thursday, April 23, 2009

Fullness of Life

This lesson returns to John 10:10 and the fullness of life. A topic which has already been covered in the introduction of this week's theme. It is implied that as we grow in our Christian life we will have increased "to the full".

Problems

It has already been pointed out that this verse is related to the parable of the sheepfold and includes much more than living our lives to the full in the way described in this lesson. Rather, it is about being more alive because we now have a physical body and soul that is joined with a living spirit. We are more alive because, as Christians, we are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit who brings life to our spirit. It is about being members of God's sheepfold. It is about a life that is full of assurance of salvation, safe in God's sheepfold. Then, and only then, can the working out of the fullness of life as described in this lesson occur.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 5:23 KJV).

The lesson author almost has it right when he states that a person who is living life to the full is one whose life "will, therefore, be eternal". A correction is needed here. A person who has "fullness of life" already has eternal life. When we have eternal fullness of life, we can live exciting lives, lives lived to the full.

Summary

- A person who is living life to the full is someone who is in God's sheepfold. This person is someone whose whole spirit, soul and physical body have been made fully alive.

Day 7: Friday, April 24, 2009

Further Study

A couple of sections are quoted from the book; Steps to Christ, then a review of the week in the form of four discussion questions are presented.

Problems

These discussion questions are concerned with such topics as; quality of life for the terminally ill, the meaning and purpose of life for those who are about to die, the detrimental effects of our contemporary culture and moral values, and the importance of the Adventist health message. Only the Bible can give valid answers to these questions.

Asking a person what they think is ok but our responses should be rooted in the Word of God. Each of us should know what the Bible actually says on any given topic when we express what we think. Today's lesson is totally barren of any quotes or direct reference to Scripture.

It is critically important to support what we think based upon what God says in the Bible. By not directing attention to Scripture or encouraging a person to frame their thinking around the Written Word, worldly opinion is given just as much justification as God's eternal truth. That will only lead to confusion, sickness and death.

So, let's return once again, to this week's memory verse:

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10 KJV).

We need to be reminded that Satan our enemy is always nearby and ready steal, kill and destroy. We can only avoid the trap of his lies if we stay protected in God's word through the indwelling leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:10-18 KJV).

Summary

1. Scripture warns us about the wiles of the devil and that we need to be protected by putting on the full armour of God. This includes "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God".
2. The only person who can avoid the traps of the devil is the one who has a saving belief in the gospel message of Jesus Christ and remembers to put on the full armour of God.