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The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Third Quarter—Lesson XII—Sept. 19

PAUL'S ADDRESS TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS.—Acts 20: 22-35.

Read Verses 3-38.

Commit Verses 22-24.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.—Acts 20: 35.

PAUL REVISITS THE CHURCHES IN EUROPE.—20: 1-3. Paul, as we saw in Lesson IX., was expelled from Ephesus, after laboring there for three years. This took place in May, A. D. 57. The next ten months were spent in Macedonia and Greece in revisiting the churches he had founded four to six years before. Paul reached Corinth, Nov. A. D. 57, remaining there three months. It was about four years since he left Corinth, after a stay there of a year and a half.

PAUL'S WORK DURING THIS TOUR. 1. Paul, amid sickness and afflictions on every side, "fightings without and fears within" had much to do in caring for all the churches.

2. A collection was taken up in the various churches on this tour (Rom. 15: 25), for Paul to carry to the poor disciples at Jerusalem, according to his promise seven years before.

3. The Second Epistle to the Corinthians was written during this tour in Macedonia, late in A. D. 57.

4. The Epistle to the Galatians was written about this time, A. D. 58, from Corinth.

5. The Epistle to the Romans was also written at Corinth during this visit.

6. Paul extended his missionary work into regions hitherto unreached going as far as Illyricum, north-west of Macedonia, and extending to the borders of Italy.

7. Paul was giving his last farewell to the churches he loved.

THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY.—Vs. 4-15. After three months at Corinth Paul started on his journey to Jerusalem, hoping to reach there by Pentecost.

Seven Companions are named as sent with Paul as far as Asia. They were doubtless delegates from the leading churches (I. Cor. 16: 3) to aid Paul in carrying the large sums of money which had been collected to the church at Jerusalem, with the salutations of the Gentile churches. In carrying so large a sum in trust these acted as auditors of his accounts, and would be witnesses that all was right. Paul sought to avoid even the suspicion of the malversations. They would act as a body-guard through the more dangerous part of the journey.

But a plot against Paul being discovered at Corinth, he suddenly changed his plan. His companions went by sea to Troas, while Paul went by land to Philippi, where Luke joined him, and then sailed to Troas. There was a brief delay of the ship at Miletus, that Paul was able to have a much-desired conference with the Ephesian church, from which he had been driven away a year before. The time of the sailing of the ship was uncertain, so that Paul, instead of going to Ephesus himself, sent for the leaders of that church to meet him at Miletus. Then followed one of the most touching addresses ever spoken.

A REVIEW OF THE PAST.—Vs. 18-21. His life was open before them. His work was amid many trials. He supported himself by daily labor. He was humble and unselfish. He was faithful. He labored publicly. He went from house to house. His teaching, repentance and faith.

Blessed are those teachers who follow in Paul's footsteps, and can look back upon such a past. God will say to them, "Well done, good and faithful, enter into the joy of your Lord."

THE PRESENT OUTLOOK.—Vs. 22-30.—I go bound in the spirit. Constrained by an invincible sense of duty. Not knowing the things. What will be the particular events. He only knew by his past experience, by the inward light of the Holy Spirit, by prophets. Have bonds. Chains, imprisonment, as of Caesarea and Rome. Afflictions. Most of the lessons following in Acts are on account of these afflictions. Abide me. There was some dark, unaccountable calamity looming up. None of these things move me from the path of duty. So that I might finish my course. He speaks of his life under the figure of a race course, in which as an athlete he is pressing toward the goal and the reward. Four years later, A. D. 62, he expresses the same thought more fully in glowing words. "This one thing I do," etc. And seven or eight years later, A. D. 65 or 66, he is able to triumphantly exclaim, "I have fought a good fight," etc. With joy. The joy of gaining the victory and winning the crown. And the ministry. The service of God in bringing in his kingdom and leading men to Christ. Which I have received of the Lord Jesus. Jesus

chose him as an apostle as he repeatedly asserts. To testify. Paul bore witness to what God had taught him. The gospel of the grace of God. The good news of God's favor and forgiving love to man. And now I know. I am convinced, I feel sure. Shall see my face no more. He was going on toward prison and death. Wherefore I take you to record. I call you to witness. I am pure from the blood of all men. If any of you fail of everlasting life, it will not be my fault. For I have not shunned. No fear of unpopularity, no anxiety to say only smooth and pleasant things, had kept him from declaring all of God's truth. All the counsel of God. What God had proposed and planned for the salvation of men. Take heed therefore. For the responsibility lies with you. Unto yourselves. That you be right and true. What you are is of the utmost importance. And to all the flock. Note the word ALL, the poorest the weakest, the erring, the neglected, the disagreeable; and especially to the lambs of the flock. That church accomplishes most which looks best after the children. Over the which, better as R. V., in the which, for in the Christian church the leaders are part of the flock, not rulers over it. The Holy Ghost have made you. Because he directed the church to choose you; he endowed you with the needful talents; he gave you the needful spiritual grace. Overseers. The word usually translated "bishops." The same persons are called elders or presbyters in verse 17. These men were to oversee, not to dictate to the church. To feed the church. To shepherd the flock, to do for it spiritually what the shepherd does for his sheep—feed, care for, defend, guide. The church of God. Belonging to God, devoted to God. Which he has purchased. Acquired, made his own at great cost to himself. With his own blood. At the cost of his life, in Christ. For I know, from observation and experience, and from the insight given by the Holy Spirit. Shall grievous woeful. They may come in sheep's clothing, under the guise of friends and teachers. They were those who taught false doctrines, bad morals, and brought worldliness and contentions. Not sparing the flock. Seeking selfish interests, no matter how many were lost or injured by it. Of your own selves. The wolves were enemies who came in from without, as Judaizing teachers; the men speaking perverse things grew up among the members of the church, and taught in the name of Christianity. Perverse things. Truths distorted from their true meaning. The most dangerous errors are truths distorted and perverted; truth enough to make some believe them, and error enough to injure or ruin those who do believe.

PARTING COUNSELS IN VIEW OF THESE THINGS.—Vs. 31-35. Therefore watch. They should watch against dangers, against wolves in sheep's clothing, against the perversions of the truth. Paul had been on the watch for the whole three years he was with them. Warn. . . night and day with tears. The dangers must have been very great, and the blessings to be attained exceedingly valuable, to make Paul so earnest. To the word of his grace. The precious truths and promises which God has sent to us in his Word. Able to build you up. The Christian is to be built up upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, like a temple, filled with worship and love. The whole church was to be built up in numbers and in graces, in truth and in good works. And to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. Made holy. Without holiness no man can see God. God will give all who become disciples of Christ an inheritance among his people. It is present and future. It is an eternal possession. It is not earned, but is the gift of God, because we are his children. I have coveted, etc. I have sought you and not yours. And I have shown it as ye yourselves know, by supporting myself by the labor of my hands at tent-making. Ye ought to support the weak. That is, those unable, in consequence of physical infirmity, to labor for their own support. No Christian should labor chiefly for himself, but that he may give to the poor, and spread the gospel of our Lord. And to remember the words of the Lord Jesus. The words are not in our gospels. John says that a great number of Christ's sayings are not there. It is more blessed to give than to receive. The Lord Jesus speaks from experience when he explains how pleasant it is to give. It is blessed to receive, to be loved, to be ministered unto. But the blessedness of giving is much greater and higher, for it brings greater happiness. It produces a higher quality of happiness. It is the mark of a noble character. It is the blessedness of God, who is the Great Giver. It is the blessedness of Christ, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." It is the blessedness of heaven. It

is the blessedness of the Christian religion, which is founded on love, and lives in loving and giving.

At the close of this address, followed by prayer, there was a sad parting, and each company went its own way.

How Can the Sunday-School be Improved?

As it seems to me, there needs to be a more general recognition of the fact that the Sunday-school can be improved. True, there is every where inquiry about improvement, but too often this inquiry is too general. How can the Sunday-school be improved? rather than. How can my Sunday-school, or my work in the Sunday-school, be improved? We are prone to be jealous of those institutions with which we are personally connected. While we all admit that home life might be better, we are slow to admit the possibility or need of improvement in our own home life. Church members, Sunday-school workers, are ready to attend conventions, and discuss better methods of church work, but too often are slow to admit the need of better methods in their own church or Sunday-school. The fact that the system of truth presented in the Bible is beyond the possibility of improvement is allowed to induce conviction, unconsciously, it may be, that our methods of presenting this truth, of bringing it to act upon the mind and heart of controlling and operating the agencies for its extension, are not largely capable of improvement.

The Sunday-school, so far as relates to its methods, is subject to all the imperfections resultant from human limitations, hence is capable of growth, improvement; this not only of Sunday school work in general, but of each individual school, your school, my school, the work of every one in the school, whether pastor, officer, teacher, or scholar.

How, then, shall we ascertain what improvement is possible and necessary? There is but one rational answer,—by studying the Sunday-school as an institution, with this end in view. This is a truth of general application. The wise merchant who discovers that his business is not prosperous does not at once about instituting changes, but looks carefully for the weak place. If a certain department is failing to the rear, he inquires for the cause. May it be its location? something in the quality of the goods? inadequate advertising? some defect in the work of the salesman? He will be very unwise to introduce any radical change without careful study and investigation of the situation and needs. Change for the sake of change is as likely to be detrimental as helpful, perhaps more likely.

A railroad company finds its trains do not make the time they expected. What shall they do? Discharge the engineer or fireman? That may be what is needed, but it may not be. They had better first look for the weak place. It may be a defective roadbed, sharp curves or heavy grades, locomotives not capable of such speed, poor telegraphic service, resulting in the holding of trains, incompetent or indifferent conductors. Improvements may be needed at several or all of these points. The institution, if it has not received it, must have careful study as to every related particular. The railroad company that is not constantly on the qui vive for better equipments, and that will not provide facilities for the preparation of better qualified operatives, will fall in the rear.

Is it sacrilegious to say that the same principle holds in relation to the Sunday-school, no matter how sacred its mission and work? It, too, must be a subject of constant study, not in order to find where changes may be made, but to find where improvements are needed, and to discover exactly what change may be introduced with good hope of effecting improvement, and just how to make the change.

If your Sunday-school is not coming up to the standard, (and what one is so near that farther approach is impossible) then let it be studied to ascertain where the weak place is. Is it in the superintendency? Is it in the grading and classification? Is it in the equipment? Is it in the teaching force? Is it on the social side of the work? Is it on the spiritual side? Is it in the discipline? Admitting that the teachers are the best to be had under the circumstances, are they teaching the classes to which they are best adapted? What is being done for their better qualification. What more can be done? What is being done to assure qualified teachers when these drop out? What more can be done? Is the hour of meeting the best the school can have, all things considered? What is being done to bring the homes represented into closer touch with the school? What peculiar conditions exist in any or many of these homes that need to be considered in adapting the work of the school to them?

What is being done to interest that part of the church that does not attend the school? What more can be done? Will the Home Department help?

These questions and many others need constant study. From their nature, they must be asked and answered by each school for itself. Help may be secured from the study of methods used by others, but every method, however successfully used by any school, must be adapted to the peculiar conditions in any other school. Each school has its own life, and its own conditions and needs. This renders it necessary that this study of conditions be constant, intense, judicious.

And the Sunday-school deserves such study. Having upon its records the names of more than thirteen millions of the population of our country, being engaged in the teaching of fundamental truth, dealing with its pupils largely in the formative period of their lives, it is high time that this institution receive, not only careful religious consideration, but a scientific study akin to that given our public schools, that its possibilities may be discovered, its needs supplied, and, as the result, its mission more largely achieved. The spirit that prompts to this study will also guide to the proper introduction of the improvements believed possible. —Dr. Kephart in S. S. Times.

The late William Arnot recorded in his diary that as he became older he grew more brief and simple in his private devotions, remarking, "I suppose there are really two kinds of brevity in prayer—one because you are far off, and one because you are far in." There is a deep truth in that remark which, however, should not be abused in the interest of haphazard and thoughtless devotions.

If we look down, then our shoulders stoop. If our thoughts look down, our character bends. It is only when we hold our heads up that the body becomes erect. It is only when our thoughts go up that our life becomes erect.—Alexander McKenzie.

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