

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Third Quarter 2014: *The Teachings of Jesus*
Lesson 6 “Growing in Christ”

Read for this week’s study

John 3:1–15; Matt. 13:33; 2 Cor. 5:17; John 15:4–10; Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 9:23, 24.

Memory Text

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ ” (John 3:3, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. To Be Born Again
- III. The New Life in Christ
- IV. Abiding in Christ
- V. Prayer
- VI. Die to Self Every Day
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Jon Paulien

1. Read John 2:23 – 3:2. What connections do you see between the last three verses of John 2 and the first two verses of John 3? If the Nicodemus story is connected to the last three verses of chapter 2, what is the significance of that connection for the meaning of chapter 3? (Sabbath afternoon’s lesson)
2. Read John 3:1-15. What does it mean to be “born again” or “born from above” (different possibilities from the same Greek word). What relation does this concept have with Old Testament texts like Psalm 51:10 and Ezekiel 36:26? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. When Jesus says we must be “born of water and of the Spirit” what does He mean by “water?” Compare with other references to water in John (1:19-28; 2:6-9; 4:11-15; 7:37-39). What are the similarities and differences between physical and spiritual birth? (Sunday’s lesson)
4. Read John 3:8. Is this text about the Holy Spirit or is it about us? What significance does this text have in either case? The Spirit brings both fruits (Galatians 5:22-23) and gifts (1 Corinthians 12:3-31) into our lives. Which of the two is most closely related to John 3:8? (Monday’s lesson)

5. How do texts like Titus 3:5-7, 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15 relate to Jesus' concept of the new birth? (Monday's lesson)
6. Read Matthew 6:4-13 and 7:7-11. How can one "abide" in prayer without falling into the trap of "vain repetitions?" How can different parts of the Lord's prayer help us grow in Christ? (Wednesday's lesson)
7. When it comes to prayer and abiding in the Spirit, what is the role of Jesus' "intercession?" John 16:23-27. (Wednesday's lesson)
8. What does it mean to "die to self" or "take up one's cross" (Luke 9:23-27)? How does one actually do this in practical terms? (Thursday's lesson)
9. How do you maintain faith in God and His promises when your prayers have not been answered in the way you wanted or expected? (Friday's lesson)

John 2:23 – 3:2

John 2:23-25

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many ***believed in his name*** when they saw the signs that he was doing.²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not **entrust** himself to them, because he knew all people²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

3:1-2

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.² This man came to Jesus **by night** and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that ***you are a teacher come from God***, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Has anything really important changed when we are restored to faith and trust? Did Jesus say to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, unless you be justified, unless you be forgiven, you will not see the Kingdom"? What did He tell him? "Unless you're born again." That's all He mentioned. And He said, "You will be born of the Spirit," too. So, when you've been a rebel, an untrusting, untrustworthy rebel, unwilling to listen to God, stubborn, as Jeremiah says, going backward rather than forward, and you've heard the good news, and you've been won to a willingness to listen and stand humbly in His presence and ask, "What must I do to be saved?"; would you be able to do that without a new heart and a right spirit? You're already converted and reborn. I do not believe a person can have any faith in God without rebirth and conversion. They all come at once. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 –

Galatians, recorded May, 1982 Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>

We live in an orderly universe, or there could be no freedom! And we shouldn't have had to be told about this order, but we were so disorderly God had to say, "Behave in a more orderly manner." Some day, when we act in a mature manner, we will choose to be orderly, realizing that that is the basis of freedom. And we'll do what's right because it is right, and not because we've been told to. But that's not the normal course of events for us damaged sinners. And so, Galatians 6:15; maybe let's just end with this. Look what Paul says, having said, "I've written this with my own hand in large letters." This was a very important letter. Look at verse 15: "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

And you could put anything you like in there. Sabbath keeping, tithe-paying, you name it. Nothing matters if it doesn't lead to a new creation. And that's what Jesus said to Nicodemus. If all of this that you're doing and all this that you know, does not lead to a new heart and a right spirit, it has done you no good at all. And the thief on the cross would wonder what on earth we've been talking about this evening, because he was theologically quite uninformed, but he had a new heart and a right spirit. He could not have said what he said to Jesus; he couldn't have changed from a cursing, reviling thief to one who would say, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom", if he hadn't been converted and reborn. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians, recorded May, 1982 Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>

Recommended Listening:

Conversations About God session 15 "Talking To God As A Friend" is available at: <http://pkp.cc/15MMCAAG>

Further Study with Ellen White

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature, that by beholding, we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. {GC88 555.2}

God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures. {COL 60.1}

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God. {DA 466.4}

Pure religion has to do with the will. The will is the governing power in the nature of man, bringing all the other faculties under its sway. The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power which works in the children of men unto obedience to God or unto disobedience. {FLB 154.4}

Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. {SC 34.2}

The government of God is not, as Satan would make it appear, founded upon a blind submission, an unreasoning control. It appeals to the intellect and the conscience. "Come now, and let us reason together" is the Creator's invitation to the beings He has made. Isaiah 1:18. God does not force the will of His creatures. He cannot accept an homage that is not willingly and intelligently given. A mere forced submission would prevent all real development of mind or character; it would make man a mere automaton. Such is not the purpose of the Creator. He desires that man, the crowning work of His creative power, shall reach the highest possible development. He sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. {SC 43.4}

No man without his own consent can be overcome by Satan. The tempter has no power to control the will or to force the soul to sin. He may distress, but he cannot contaminate. He can cause agony, but not defilement. The fact that Christ has conquered should inspire His followers with courage to fight manfully the battle against sin and Satan. {GC 510.3}

The victory is not won without much earnest prayer, without the humbling of self at every step. Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. The stronghold of Satan would not be broken. The will must be placed on the side of God's will. You are not able, of yourself, to bring your purposes and desires and inclinations into submission to

the will of God; but if you are “willing to be made willing,” God will accomplish the work for you, even “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5. Then you will “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12, 13. {MB 142.1}

Satan was exulting that he had succeeded in debasing the image of God in humanity. Then Jesus came to restore in man the image of his Maker. None but Christ can fashion anew the character that has been ruined by sin. He came to expel the demons that had controlled the will. He came to lift us up from the dust, to reshape the marred character after the pattern of His divine character, and to make it beautiful with His own glory. {DA 37.3}

Even John, the beloved disciple, the one who most fully reflected the likeness of the Saviour, did not naturally possess that loveliness of character. He was not only self-assertive and ambitious for honor, but impetuous, and resentful under injuries. But as the character of the Divine One was manifested to him, he saw his own deficiency and was humbled by the knowledge. The strength and patience, the power and tenderness, the majesty and meekness, that he beheld in the daily life of the Son of God, filled his soul with admiration and love. Day by day his heart was drawn out toward Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master. His resentful, ambitious temper was yielded to the molding power of Christ. The regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit renewed his heart. The power of the love of Christ wrought a transformation of character. This is the sure result of union with Jesus. When Christ abides in the heart, the whole nature is transformed. Christ’s Spirit, His love, softens the heart, subdues the soul, and raises the thoughts and desires toward God and heaven. {SC 73.1}

God does not control our minds without our consent; but every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they may find deliverance in Christ. The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart’s unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who consent to enter into covenant with God are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. {MH 93.1}

Marvelous will be the transformation wrought in him who by faith opens the door of the heart to the Saviour. {MH 93.3}

The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man’s sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication. Our Saviour is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the contrite heart, and grace and peace are multiplied to His

faithful ones. Gladly He grants them the blessings they need in their struggle against the evils that beset them. {AA 532.2}

Wherever there is union with Christ there is love. Whatever other fruits we may bear, if love be missing, they profit nothing. Love to God and our neighbor is the very essence of our religion. No one can love Christ and not love His children. When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within. We drink in the love of Christ, as the branch draws nourishment from the vine. If we are grafted in Christ, if fiber by fiber we have been united with the Living Vine, we shall give evidence of the fact by bearing rich clusters of living fruit. If we are connected with the Light, we shall be channels of light, and in our words and works we shall reflect light to the world. Those who are truly Christians are bound with the chain of love which links earth to heaven, which binds finite man to the infinite God. The light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ shines in the hearts of His followers, to the glory of God. {1SM 337.2}

It is the fragrance of our love for our fellow men that reveals our love for God. It is patience in service that brings rest to the soul. It is through humble, diligent, faithful toil that the welfare of Israel is promoted. God upholds and strengthens the one who is willing to follow in Christ's way. {AA 560.2}

Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience. {AA 560.3}

Prayer is heaven's ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; and the promise is, "Ye shall receive." {AA 564.1}

The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. It is the knowledge that works transformation of character. This knowledge, received, will re-create the soul in the image of God. It will impart to the whole being a spiritual power that is divine. {MH 425.2}

None are so vile, none have fallen so low, as to be beyond the working of this power. In all who will submit themselves to the Holy Spirit a new principle of life is to be implanted; the lost image of God is to be restored in humanity. {COL 96.1}

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. {COL 97.3}

Christ delights to take apparently hopeless material, those whom Satan has debased and through whom he has worked, and make them the subjects of His grace. He rejoices to deliver them from suffering and from the wrath that is to fall upon the disobedient. He makes His children His agents in the accomplishment of this work, and in its success, even in this life, they find a precious reward. {6T 308.3}

Before the world, God is developing us as living witnesses to what men and women may become through the grace of Christ.—*Signs of the Times*, Sept. 3, 1902. {RC 35.6}

The power of truth is to transform heart and character. Its effect is not like a dash of color here and there upon the canvas; the whole character is to be transformed, the image of Christ is to be revealed in words and actions. A new nature is imparted. Man is renewed after the image of Christ in righteousness and true holiness. . . . The grace of Christ is essential every day, every hour. Unless it is with us continually, the inconsistencies of the natural heart will appear and the life will present a divided service. The character is to be full of grace and truth. Wherever the religion of Christ works, it will brighten and sweeten every detail of life with more than an earthly joy and a higher than earthly peace (Letter 2a, 1892). {6BC 1117.15}