

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2014: *The Teachings of Jesus*

Lesson 8 “The Church”

Read for this week’s study

Deut. 32:4; Ps. 28:1; John 17; John 15:1–5; Matt. 7:1–5; Matt. 5:23, 24; 18:15–18.

Memory Text

“ I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me’ ” (John 17:20, 21, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Foundation of the Church
- III. Christ’s Prayer for Unity
- IV. Christ’s Provision for Unity
- V. A Great Obstacle for Unity
- VI. The Restoration of Unity
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Daniel Duda

1. “According to the Gospels, the term *church* appears on the lips of Jesus only three times (*Matt. 16:18, 18:17*). This doesn’t mean, however, that He didn’t deal with the subject. In fact, He taught very important concepts relating to the church. Our study this week will center on two main ideas: the foundation of the church and the unity of the church. (Sabbath afternoon)
2. How is the church a continuation of Old Testament covenantal community and how is it different? The first two paragraphs of the lesson emphasize both: “In the course of sacred history, that covenant relationship was continued by the church. (...) The church owes its existence to Jesus Christ. He is its Originator.” (Sabbath afternoon)
3. “Jesus said ‘on this rock I will build My church’ (*Matt. 16:18, NKJV*). Who is the *rock* (*petra* in Greek) upon which the church is built?” (Sunday’s lesson) Why has the interpretation of this text caused so much controversy in Christian history? What is at stake? Jesus was not going to build an actual city, or an actual Temple. He was going to build a community, consisting of all those who give allegiance to Him as

God's anointed king. And this movement, this community, started then and there at Caesarea Philippi, with this declaration that Peter uttered.

4. "John 17 presents Jesus' longest intercessory prayer recorded in the Bible. It is encouraging to think that He prayed for everyone who believes in Him, including each of us." (Monday's lesson) Besides being encouraging, what is the theological significance? Why is unity so crucial for the life of the church?
5. "This kind of unity does not happen spontaneously. In order to have it, we must fully accept Christ's lordship in our lives. He must mold our character, and we must surrender our will to His will." (Monday's lesson) To what extent is it true that if we accept Christ's Lordship we achieve unity?
6. "The presence of Jesus in our hearts produces unity. He brings to our lives two things that are indispensable for unity: the divine Word and divine love." (...) Unity in Jesus means unity in the Word of God. In order to have unity, we need to agree on the content of the truth as presented in the Word of God." (Tuesday's lesson) Does the fact that Jesus is present in our hearts (whatever that metaphor means) eradicate the differences in opinion regarding the meaning of the Word? Can you point to times this has happened in Christian history?
7. "Any attempt to attain unity without adherence to a body of biblical beliefs is destined to failure." (Tuesday's lesson) How did we get from the Word to "beliefs"? Is the purpose of the Word to arrive at "fundamental beliefs" or creation of a new type of community?
8. "It has not always been easy to maintain a high view of truth and to have deep love for one another at the same time. There is always the risk of emphasizing one at the expense of the other. There was a time when doctrine alone was considered the most important element for unity. Fortunately, this lack of balance has been gradually corrected." (Tuesday's lesson) Does this paragraph speak about Christian history or recent SDA history, or possibly both?
9. "The apostolic church exhibited the unity for which Christ prayed. 'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [truth] and fellowship [love]' (*Acts 2:42, NKJV*)." (Tuesday's lesson) One would not want to discount what the early church achieved, but is this a realistic picture of the early church? And if we see history through rose colored glasses, what is the probability that we are going to see reality in our times in a balanced way?
10. "How can Jesus' words in Matthew 7:1-5 help us to avoid divisions and conflicts in the church?" (Wednesday's lesson) Is it better to deal with divisions and conflicts rather than avoid them? Which approach produces better skills in living with reality?
11. "Before we can obtain God's pardon, however, we must make things right with others. Reconciliation requires a humble recognition of our faults. Without this attitude, how could we ask for God's forgiveness?" (Thursday's lesson) Once again, what model of forgiveness is this? Is God's forgiveness a reward for what we did?

What about the alternate model, “it is God’s goodness that leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4)?

12. “Finally, and only if the first two attempts have failed, we should ‘tell it to the church’—not yet for a disciplinary action but for an ultimate appeal to lead to repentance. From the beginning, the whole process has a redemptive goal (*Gal. 6:1*).” (Thursday’s lesson) Thursday’s lesson deals with the ‘church discipline’ process as described in Matthew 18:15-18. Is there any connection between a person’s model of salvation and their model of church discipline? What are the implications for one’s model of discipline if you believe in a forensic or in a healing model? What about our past experiences of being hurt and wronged, especially in early parts of our lives when we had no tools for defending ourselves?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

The kind of at-one-ment God desires is described in the New Testament as a unity that is inherent in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God.” People who love and trust the same Jesus and the same God are naturally attracted to each other. The same truth about God that sets them free from tyranny and fear binds them together in the firmest kind of unity. Friends of a friendly God enjoy at-one-ment with each other.

This is where the meaning of the cross is so important. There can be no friendship and at-one-ment where there is fear. Calvary says there is no need to be afraid of God. When God says, “Be my friend,” he’s not saying, “Be my friend or I’ll punish you severely; I’ll even put you to death.” You don’t talk that way to friends—especially if you want to keep their friendship. And friendship is the whole purpose and meaning of atonement. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 165. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter12.html>

There is no closer unity than this oneness that is inherent in our faith. Growing up together in love and admiration for the same Christ and the same God, we are bound together by the very truth that sets us free! God’s true church is made up of individuals who in the highest sense of freedom choose to band together for mutual encouragement and for greater efficiency in spreading the gospel to all the world.

God still waits for his children to grow up like this. He needs better spokesmen than Jonah proved to be. Reluctant teachers of the truth, moved only by fear or obligation, are themselves a sad denial of the content of the Good News. God waits for loyal people who are proud of the Good News, who “look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on” (2 Peter 3:12, NEB). {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 143. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-13>

Do you believe in the atonement? If anybody asks you that say, “Tell me what you mean by the atonement!” To some that’s the thing Christ did to reconcile the Father unto us and assuage His offended wrath. That’s a very legalistic view, but if you take atonement to mean at-one-ment, harmony, unity, the marvelous unity of the Trinity—they are as one; they outdo one another in honoring each other. That’s atonement, that’s harmony, that’s unity. God wishes us all to share in that. Yes, we believe in the atonement and that Christ died that there might be peace and reconciliation and an end to the war. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Understanding the Mission of the Church, number 6, recorded September, 1983, Camp AuSable, Michigan} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/6MMUTMOTC>*

Further Study with Ellen White

In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world’s teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ’s object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. {AA 20.2}

In this last meeting with His disciples, the great desire which Christ expressed for them was that they might love one another as He had loved them. Again and again He spoke of this. “These things I command you,” He said repeatedly, “that ye love one another.” His very first injunction when alone with them in the upper chamber was, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. He saw that new ideas and impulses must control them; that new principles must be practiced by them; through His life and death they were to receive a new conception of love. The command to love one another had a new meaning in the light of His self-sacrifice. The whole work of grace is one continual service of love, of self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. During every hour of Christ’s sojourn upon the earth, the love of God was flowing from Him in irrepressible streams. All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another. {DA 677.2}

This love is the evidence of their discipleship. “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,” said Jesus, “if ye have love one to another.” When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart. {DA 678.1}

The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. In mind, in purpose, in character, they are one, but not in person. By partaking of the Spirit of God, conforming to the law of God, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ brings His disciples into a living union with Himself and with the Father. Through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind, man is made complete in Christ Jesus. Unity with Christ establishes a bond of unity with one another. This unity is the most convincing proof to the world of the majesty and virtue of Christ, and of His power to take away sin. {SD 286.3}

The grace of Christ is to work a wonderful transformation in the life and character of its receiver; and if we are truly the disciples of Christ, the world will see that divine power has done something for us; for while we are in the world, we shall not be of it. {ML 252.4}

All true children of God will reveal to the world their union with Christ and with their brethren. Those in whose hearts Christ abides will bear the fruit of brotherly love. They will realize that as members of God's family they are pledged to cultivate, cherish, and perpetuate Christian love and fellowship, in spirit, words, and action. {SD 293.2}

Human power and human might did not establish the church of God, and neither can they destroy it. Not on the rock of human strength, but on Christ Jesus, the Rock of Ages, was the church founded, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18. The presence of God gives stability to His cause. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man," is the word that comes to us. Psalm 146:3. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Isaiah 30:15. God's glorious work, founded on the eternal principles of right, will never come to nought. It will go on from strength to strength, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zechariah 4:6. {PK 595.3}

The effort to earn salvation by one's own works inevitably leads men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin. For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey. All this turns the mind away from God to self. His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men. A system of human invention, with its multitudinous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard. The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies. {MB 123.1}

The Pharisees were of this class. They came forth from their religious services, not humbled with a sense of their own weakness, not grateful for the great privileges that God had given them. They came forth filled with spiritual pride, and their theme was, "Myself, my feelings, my knowledge, my ways." Their own attainments became the standard by which they judged others. Putting on the robes of self-dignity, they mounted the judgment seat to criticize and condemn. {MB 123.2}

The people partook largely of the same spirit, intruding upon the province of conscience and judging one another in matters that lay between the soul and God. It was in reference to this spirit and practice that Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." That is, do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of Scripture, a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them. {MB 123.3}

"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." 1 Corinthians 4:5. We cannot read the heart. Ourselves faulty, we are not qualified to sit in judgment upon others. Finite men can judge only from outward appearance. To Him alone who knows the secret springs of action, and who deals tenderly and compassionately, is it given to decide the case of every soul. {MB 124.1}