

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2015: *Proverbs*

Lesson 11 “Living by Faith”

Read for this week’s study

Prov. 28:4, 7, 9; Rom. 1:16, 17; Gal. 3:24; Prov. 28:5; 1 John 2:15–17; Prov. 29:13.

Memory Text

“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Keep the Law
- III. Seek the Lord
- IV. Words for the Rich
- V. Handbook for the Poor
- VI. Loving the Truth
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Keith Corbett

1. What is the relationship between safety, as seen in the memory verse, and salvation?
2. It is easy to say, “Rely on God” or “Live by faith” but how do we do it?
3. How do we “Seek first the kingdom of God”? {DA 302.1}
4. What does it mean to “Seek first the kingdom of God”?
5. What is the Law of God”?
6. What do you think made the Children of Israel different from the nations around them?
7. Do we acquire discernment from law or from God? Does Satan know the law? Does Satan demonstrate discernment?
8. If the “acquisition of wisdom does not depend on intellectual or spiritual exercises,” (Sunday’s lesson) what then does it depend on? How do we get it?
9. How does God communicate with, teach, and instruct His children?

10. What does Romans 1:16, 17 tell us about faith and what it is based on?
11. The *Torah* is not the source of life. Why? What does it do for us?
12. Monday's lesson states that "Faith was closely tied to intelligence and rational understanding." Why do you think this is—or is not—so? (see Par. 3 Monday; Discussion question 1 on Friday) How do you relate these statements to each other?
13. Is it bad to be rich? Is it good to be rich? Does the Bible speak against riches? What does the Bible say about riches and those who have wealth?
14. As a Christian, what would you seek to understand about the gifts God has entrusted to you? What would you interpret as the purpose of those gifts, and your responsibilities in the use of them?
15. How do you define sin?
16. Why is "truth" so important for all of God's creation?
17. How does thinking about God, the infinite One, affect our minds? (Thursday's lesson)
18. What does faith mean to you?
19. What is the difference between "Faith" and "Blind Faith"? In practical life, how do you cultivate a healthy faith and avoid the pitfalls?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

The Good News is that God has won his case. Though all of us should let him down, God cannot lose his case. He has already won! The universe has conceded that the evidence is on his side, that the devil has lied in his charges against God.

"It is finished," Jesus cried (John 19:30). By the life that he lived and the unique and awful way he died, Jesus has demonstrated the righteousness of his Father and answered any question about God's character and government (see Romans 3:25, 26).

Paul was proud to be a bearer of this Good News, and he knew what it was all about—"in it the righteousness of God is revealed" (Romans 1:16, 17).

He confessed with shame that formerly he had seriously misrepresented God, even sharing Satan's picture of God to the extent of imprisoning and persecuting men and women in order to force them to obey (see Acts 8:3; 9:1, 2; Galatians 1:13).

But after he had accepted the Good News, Paul devoted the rest of his life to telling the truth. And who has written more eloquently about freedom, love, and grace—that faith is the only requirement for heaven, that we are not under law but under grace, and that Christ is the end of legalism as a way of being saved?

“Of course, don’t misunderstand me,” Paul seems to be saying in Romans. “Does faith abolish law? Perish the thought! Faith establishes law—by putting it in proper perspective” (see Romans 3:31). For, adopting Paul’s understanding of faith, the man who really knows, loves, trusts, and admires God for his wise and orderly ways is most willing to listen and give heed to God’s instructions on any subject.

“Let me tell you,” continued Paul, “why our gracious Lord, who wants us to feel the joy and dignity of freedom, made so much use of law.”

“Why then the law?” he wrote to the Galatians. “It was added because of transgressions” (Galatians 3:19). It was designed to be our guardian, our protector, to bring us back to a right relationship with God. Correctly understood, God’s laws are no threat to our freedom. They were given solely for our best good; they all make good sense and deserve to be intelligently obeyed.

But as for those meaningless traditions that have nothing to do with the purposes of God, away with them! As Paul wrote to the Colossians: “Why... do you take the slightest notice of these purely human prohibitions— ‘Don’t touch this,’ ‘Don’t taste that,’ and ‘Don’t handle the other’? ‘This,’ ‘that,’ and ‘the other’ will all pass away after use! I know that these regulations look wise with their self-inspired efforts at piety, their policy of self-humbling, and their studied neglect of the body. But in actual practice they are of no moral value, but simply pamper the flesh” (Colossians 2:20–23, Phillips).

Worse than that, taught and obeyed in the name of Christianity, they present the Christian’s God as the arbitrary deity Satan has claimed him to be—and that is not good news.

What is it today that we Christians are trying to say about our God? Is it the truth? Is it really good news? Are we using the best ways of saying it? In spite of our best efforts, what are people actually hearing? Are there perhaps better ways to say it?

I believe that these are the most important questions facing us Christians today—for our own salvation and in order to fulfill our mission to the world. History warns that there is no justification for an easy confidence. There is a certain elusiveness about the Good News. It is not something that can be summarily stated and hammered home.

It was difficult even for God to explain the subtle though vital differences between the truth and Satan’s charges. Even for him it was more effective to demonstrate the Good News than to explain it! This is why the Bible is so largely a history of God’s handling of rebellion and his firm but gracious treatment of those who have been caught up in its destructive consequences.

It cost heaven an infinite price to bring us the Good News and confirm it with evidence that would stand for eternity. No wonder Paul was moved to speak so strongly in its defense. Just like the loyal angels, Paul was jealous for the character of God. To him it was unthinkable that

some of his fellow ministers would, in effect, lend their support to Satan's charges by attributing even the slightest trace of arbitrariness to our gracious God.

It was this same perversion of the Good News that stirred Jesus most deeply. He was gentle with the worst of sinners—with Simon in his dastardly treatment of the woman who anointed Christ's feet; with the woman taken in adultery; even with his betrayer, Judas. But when some of the religious leaders, respected teachers of the people, denied the Good News and echoed Satan's lies about God, Christ uttered those awful words, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

There was no disagreement between Jesus and those teachers as to the existence of God, or the story of Creation, or the authority of the Ten Commandments, or which day was the Sabbath. Their disagreement was about the character of God. Jesus came to bring them the Good News, a picture of God that would enable them to go on doing many of the same things but for a different reason—a reason that would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time. But they killed him rather than change their view of God—then hastened home to keep another Sabbath. {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 31-34. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-04>

Some fourteen hundred years after the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, Jesus came to live among the people who had been entrusted with this revelation of God's will. He found a people who were much preoccupied with God's law and obedience to its every detail.

Jesus never had to tell them not to set up any graven image. They had shunned idolatry since learning their lesson in Babylonian captivity.

Nor did He have to tell them which day was the Sabbath, or that in it they should not do any work. They saw it as their highest duty to keep all ten of the Ten Commandments.

Nor did Jesus have to urge them to pay tithe. They even tithed such small items as mint, dill, and cumin. See Matthew 23:23, RSV.

Or to obey the Old Testament laws of hygiene. They were careful to strain the gnat from a drink, lest they swallow a forbidden insect. See Matthew 23:24; Deuteronomy 14:19.

Or to read the Scriptures. They searched them diligently to find eternal life. See John 5: 39,40, RSV.

Or to be careful in their association with unbelievers. They even performed certain cleansing rituals on returning from the market, and shrank from eating with the Gentiles. See Mark 7:1-5; Galatians 2:11, 12.

They could say with the rich young ruler, “We have obeyed all these laws since our youth.” See Luke 18: 18-21.

In the face of such rigor and devotion, one might have thought the Lord would be pleased. But all heaven watched the extraordinary scene of people claiming to love the law while hating the Lawgiver.

Jesus ventured to suggest that they were obeying for the wrong reason and as a result were not really obeying at all; that their picture of God was in error; that if they knew the truth about God, they would obey for a different reason—a reason that would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time.

The Old Testament prophets had dealt with this problem centuries before. Amos and Isaiah had chided the people for their reluctant Sabbath keeping, their rote obedience and worship. When Jesus came, He quoted Isaiah and commended him for preaching the truth.

“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’” Mark 7:6, 7, RSV.

Then Jesus set out to tell the truth about His Father and the kind of obedience that is really pleasing to Him.

You recall what He did on the Sabbath. It was all innocent and good, but those gloomy legalists were shocked. They accused Him of disobeying the law. Think of the Lawgiver being denounced as a lawbreaker!

No, Jesus replied; “think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5: 17, RSV.

By teaching and example Jesus had come to correct the misunderstanding of God’s law, to show what it was all about. He explained that the law was made *for* people, to be an advantage to them.

Particularly was this true of the Sabbath, Jesus affirmed, as He defended the right of His hungry disciples to pick a few ears of grain. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2: 27. It was never meant to be a burden, a mere test of obedience.

“If only you knew the truth about God and His laws,” Jesus urged, “you would find that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. For He wants you to be free.” But the people accused Him of blasphemously misrepresenting God. They condemned Him as lawless and crucified Him as a heretic. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *I Want to be Free*, pp. 27-29. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970}

If Paul had been there, I wonder what question he might have asked. A few years later, in his epistle to believers in Galatia, he posed a question that would have been so appropriate for one of the disciples to raise that last night in the upper room. Paul's question was, "Why then the law?" (Galatians 3:19, NRSV)

Many of us have joined with Paul in considering this question. We love what Jesus said about freedom, friendship, love and trust. We also know from experience that none of these things can be commanded. Why, then, did God make so much use of law? Why would he order his children to love him and love each other—under threat of dire consequences if they failed to obey. Isn't this much more likely to produce trembling, sullen or even rebellious servants, rather than loyal and understanding friends? Why would God choose to run such risk?

Some of us also enjoy what Jesus said about speaking plainly and clearly. There is so much "dark speech" when people talk about God and salvation. But if God prefers simplicity and understanding, why did he tell Moses to establish such a complicated system of ceremonies and sacrifices, with all the strange symbols and figures of speech. Isn't all this mystery and pomp more likely to increase the distance between the Father and his children and make it more difficult for them to think and talk about him clearly? Why would God be willing to run this risk?

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul offers an answer to his own question. "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions." (Galatians 3:19, NRSV) This is the translation of the *New International* and the *New Revised Standard* versions.

But the Greek word translated "because of" can also mean "for the purpose of." So the *Good News Bible* says that the law was added "in order to show what wrongdoing is." And the *Revised English Bible* explains that "it was added to make wrongdoing a legal offense."

One thing seems clear. If God's people had not been misbehaving, there would have been no need for the added law. As was explained to young pastor Timothy, "laws are made, not for good people, but for lawbreakers and criminals, for the godless and sinful, for those who are not religious or spiritual, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the immoral, for sexual perverts, for kidnappers, for those who lie and give false testimony or who do anything else contrary to sound doctrine." (1 Timothy 1:9, 10, GNB)

Phillips translates, "The Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control."

God added the law because he knew we needed it. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 86-88. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter7.html>

Romans 12, you remember; “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may approve what is excellent.” Jesus said there would be false prophets. John says test all the spirits. Then some people wonder, is Ellen White biblical on this point? She is so biblical on this point. “God never asks us to believe anything for which He does not provide adequate evidence. And it is evidence that appeals to the reason. We must bring everything,” she says, “within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy so come as to set everything in a disorderly way.” She says don’t call blind credulity ‘faith’. It’s the devil’s substitute for faith. Presumption is the devil’s substitute for faith.

And yet, is it not in the realm of religion, that’s the only one, where we are invited to believe without evidence? And that’s called very wonderful, because that’s ‘faith’. And the more willing you are to believe without evidence, the more faith you have. Which would mean that the more you know what you believe in, the less faith you will need? Because eventually, when you really know, you won’t need any more faith because you know. So if you really know God, then you don’t need any faith. That doesn’t make much sense, does it?

We shouldn’t be using the word ‘faith’ at all, because faith has come to mean “believing in something you know isn’t so,” or believing something for which you have inadequate evidence. The word in the Bible is “trust.” And the Bible warns us against trusting people we do not know. Don’t even trust prophets who say, “I am a prophet of the Most High, and the angel of the Lord has told me this,” “But he lied to him.”

Look at all the warnings in the Bible. How about the one who says, “I am God.” And he asks Christ to worship him, the father of lies. **Of all the decisions we make, there is none that demands more that we inquire as to the evidence, than our decision about God.** And yet people spend more time, almost, in selection of their toothpaste, than of their God. Because you don’t choose your toothpaste by faith. You choose your God by faith. We even suggest in choosing a life’s companion, do get to know her! But with God, don’t let your head get in the way of your heart. But when you’re choosing a wife, the dormitory dean will say, “Now, don’t let your heart run away with you. Get your mind into this, now. Get to know her. Go home and see how she relates to her parents, and all these other things.” That’s old-fashioned, I know. But anyway, the thought is, do get to know her before you make your decision. But when it comes to knowing God, oh, you can trust your heart. No, the heart only pumps blood. It has nothing to do with this at all.

A man thinks in his heart, in the Bible, doesn’t he? So Paul urged them to be more discerning because of all the fakery and fraud that was going on. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Philippians/1&2 Thessalonians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links: <http://pkp.cc/69MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/70MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)*

Further Study with Ellen White

God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, will quicken all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character. Through a connection with Christ he will have clearer and broader views. His discernment will be more penetrative, his judgment better balanced. He who longs to be of service to Christ is so quickened by the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness that he is enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God. {DA 251.1}

The love which Christ diffuses through the whole being is a vitalizing power. Every vital part—the brain, the heart, the nerves—it touches with healing. By it the highest energies of the being are roused to activity. It frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care, that crush the life forces. With it come serenity and composure. It implants in the soul, joy that nothing earthly can destroy,—joy in the Holy Spirit,—health-giving, life-giving joy. {MH 115.3}

Our Saviour's words, "Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), are a prescription for the healing of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. Though men have brought suffering upon themselves by their own wrongdoing, He regards them with pity. In Him they may find help. He will do great things for those who trust in Him. {MH 115.4}

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}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {PP 34.3}

God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of love. He would have them obey Him because they have an intelligent appreciation of His wisdom, justice, and

benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love Him because they are drawn toward Him in admiration of His attributes. {GC 541.3}

All who long to bear the likeness of the character of God shall be satisfied. The Holy Spirit never leaves unassisted the soul who is looking unto Jesus. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto him. If the eye is kept fixed on Christ, the work of the Spirit ceases not until the soul is conformed to His image. The pure element of love will expand the soul, giving it a capacity for higher attainments, for increased knowledge of heavenly things, so that it will not rest short of the fullness. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." {DA 302.1}

The law of God is simple, and easily understood. If the children of men would, to the best of their ability, obey this law, they would gain strength of mind and power of discernment to comprehend still more of God's purposes and plans. And this advancement would be continued, not only during the present life, but during eternal ages; for however far he may advance in the knowledge of God's wisdom and power, there is always an infinity beyond. {SD 39.4}

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. {DA 668.3}

God desires us to reach the standard of perfection made possible for us by the gift of Christ. He calls upon us to make our choice on the right side, to connect with heavenly agencies, to adopt principles that will restore in us the divine image. In His written word and in the great book of nature He has revealed the principles of life. It is our work to obtain a knowledge of these principles, and by obedience to co-operate with Him in restoring health to the body as well as to the soul. {MH 114.4}

Although for ages sin has been strengthening its hold on the human race, although through falsehood and artifice Satan has cast the black shadow of his interpretation upon the word of God, and has caused men to doubt His goodness; yet the Father's mercy and love have not ceased to flow earthward in rich currents. If human beings would open the windows of the soul heavenward, in appreciation of the divine gifts, a flood of healing virtue would pour in. {MH 116.1}

Satan seeks to counterwork the work of God, and he is constantly urging men to accept his principles. He represents the chosen people of God as a deluded people. He is an accuser of the

brethren, and his accusing power is employed against those who work righteousness. The Lord desires through His people to answer Satan's charges by showing the results of obedience to right principles. {COL 296.4}

These principles are to be manifest in the individual Christian, in the family, in the church, and in every institution established for God's service. All are to be symbols of what can be done for the world. They are to be types of the saving power of the truths of the gospel. All are agencies in the fulfillment of God's great purpose for the human race. {COL 296.5}

The history of the past shows an active, working devil. He can no more be idle than harmless. . . . If Satan was so cunning at first, what must he be now after gaining an experience of many thousands of years? Yet God and holy angels, and all those who abide in obedience to all the Lord's expressed will, are wiser than he. The subtlety of Satan will not decrease, but the wisdom given to men through a living connection with the Source of all light and divine knowledge will be proportionate to his arts and wiles. {5T 504.1}

With the trusting faith of a little child, we are to come to our heavenly Father, telling Him of all our needs. He is always ready to pardon and help. The supply of divine wisdom is inexhaustible, and the Lord encourages us to draw largely from it. {3BC 1146.8}

You need not go to the ends of the earth for wisdom, for God is near. It is not the capabilities you now possess or ever will have that will give you success. It is that which the Lord can do for you. We need to have far less confidence in what man can do and far more confidence in what God can do for every believing soul. He longs to have you reach after Him by faith. He longs to have you expect great things from Him. He longs to give you understanding in temporal as well as in spiritual matters. He can sharpen the intellect. He can give tact and skill. Put your talents into the work, ask God for wisdom, and it will be given you. {COL 146.4}

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints. Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. {ST, July 22, 1897 par. 11}

The leaven hidden in the flour works invisibly to bring the whole mass under its leavening process; so the leaven of truth works secretly, silently, steadily, to transform the soul. The natural inclinations are softened and subdued. New thoughts, new feelings, new motives, are implanted. A new standard of character is set up—the life of Christ. The mind is changed; the faculties are roused to action in new lines. Man is not endowed with new faculties, but the faculties he has are sanctified. The conscience is awakened. We are endowed with traits of character that enable us to do service for God. {COL 98.3}