

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2016: *Rebellion and Redemption*
Lesson 7 “Jesus’ Teachings *and the Great Controversy*”

Read for this week’s study

Matthew 11:29; Romans 4:1–6; Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23; Matthew 7:21–27; James 2:17;
Matthew 7:1–5.

Memory Text

“ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ ” (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Many Kinds of Rest
- III. Planting and Harvesting
- IV. Building on Rock
- V. Do Not Judge
- VI. “I Am With You Always”
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “When we think of the great-controversy theme, we tend to think of it in grand, overarching terms. That is, it’s a big-picture view. It can be called a ‘meta-narrative,’ a story that covers and explains a large portion of reality, as opposed to a local narrative or story that explains something much more limited in scope. (...) In this week’s lesson, we will look at some of Jesus’ teachings on very down-to-earth and practical matters as we all struggle to know and do God’s will amid the great controversy.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. “This offer points to a personal dimension amid the much larger one of Jesus’ mission to free people from the enemy. His words are actually adapted from Jeremiah, who promises people rest for their souls if they return to the religion of their fathers, instead of the paganism of the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 6:16).” (Sunday’s lesson)
3. The Pharisees had spoken of people being called to carry ‘the yoke of the Torah’, the heavy burden of the Jewish law with all its commandments. Jesus offered a different

'yoke', which because it came from His mercy and love, was easy to bear. When Jesus declares that He is 'meek and lowly of heart' He is not boasting that He has attained some special level of spiritual achievement. He wants us to understand that He is not going to stand over us like a policeman, He is not going to be cross with us like an angry schoolteacher. It is an encouragement, a blessing, to see who the Father is and to come into His loving, welcoming presence.

4. "The great-controversy theme is implicit in Jesus' parable of the sower. The listing of four types of responses to the gospel message indicates that there are more than just 'good' and 'bad' people in the world. Life is more complex than that, and so we need to be careful how we approach those who don't seem to respond to the gospel as we think they should." "One could ask, Why couldn't the farmer be more careful and not waste seed by throwing it on the path? Why couldn't he be more diligent in digging out the rocks? Why didn't he pull more weeds?" (Monday's lesson)
5. Reading all of this, I have the same response I always do to this parable: I start worrying about what kind of ground I am with God. I start worrying about how many birds are in my field, how many rocks, how many thorns. I start worrying about how I could clean them all up, how I could be turned into a well-tilled, well-weeded, well-fertilized field for the sowing of God's word. I start worrying about how the odds are three to one against me—those are the odds in the parable, after all—and I begin thinking about how I could beat the odds, or at least improve on them, by cleaning up my act. That is the usual response to this parable. I hear it as a challenge to be different, as a call to improve my life, so that if the same parable were ever told about me it would have a happier ending, with all of the seed falling on rich, fertile soil. But there is something wrong with that self-centered reading of the parable, because if that is what it is about then it should be called the parable of the different kinds of ground.
6. Instead, it has been known for centuries as the parable of the sower, which means that there is a chance that we have got it all backwards. We hear it as a story about us, but what if we are wrong? What if it is not about us at all but about the Sower? What if it is not about our own successes and failures and birds and rocks and thorns but about the extravagance of a Sower who does not seem to be fazed by such concerns, who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon, who feeds the birds, whistles at the rocks, picks his way through the thorns, shouts hallelujah at the good soil and just keeps on sowing, confident that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty, and that when the harvest comes at last it will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters?
7. If this is really the parable of the Sower and not the parable of the different kinds of ground, then it begins to sound quite new. The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our Maker, the prolific Sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very

practical, but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth.

8. “What comes to mind when you imagine this story? Where is the rock and where is the sand? For some people, sand is found only at the beach, but this story is probably not about a seaside residence. The more likely place is among the gentle rolling hills upon which most villages were located, at the side of a valley somewhere.” (Tuesday’s lesson) We can happily sing “We Build on a Rock” (SDAH 531), yet the parable is about something else.
9. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is quite blunt: This is what I say to you. Never mind what you have heard elsewhere. Never mind that the text has been read differently for over a thousand years. This is the way we have to read it now. And then he let his hearers know that they will be judged by doing what Jesus says or not doing it: this makes the difference between a house that stands firm in a storm and a house that falls with a great crash. If we build our lives on Jesus’ teaching, we will be part of the ‘house’ that lasts forever.
10. “When Jesus told His audience not to judge, He made two important points. The first is that the reason we judge others is because we do the very same thing we are condemning (Matthew 7:1, 2). We take the attention off ourselves and ensure that everyone around us is looking at the person we condemn rather than at us. The other point Jesus makes is that often the problem we see in our brother or sister is only a fraction of the size of our own problem—a problem that we may not even be aware of. It is so easy for us to see a piece of sawdust in their eye, but we are unable to see the great wooden beam in our own.” (Wednesday’s lesson)
11. Here Jesus refers to the judgments and condemnations that occur within ordinary lives, when people set themselves up as moral guardians and critics of one another. The scribes and Pharisees (5:20) of the day were a hard-line pressure group that created a moral climate in which everybody looks at everybody else to see if they are keeping their standards up.
12. We are told repeatedly that plain reading of the Scripture is the proper way to interpret it. Yet if you read Matthew, you see that Jesus expects His disciples to be able to interpret, to use and teach a number of apparent contradictions in His teachings. For example, in 5:22, Jesus warns His disciples that they will be in danger of the fire of hell if they call anyone a fool or a moron, but then He Himself in 23:17 calls the scribes and Pharisees fools. In the Beatitudes we are informed, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (5:9) but later, in 10:34, Jesus declares, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”. “In the same way, let your (plural) light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:16), yet Jesus says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (6:1). “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (7:1-2), yet Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" (7:15-16). His disciples must make sense of and live with such apparent contradictions.

13. "Jesus, who never changes, who is always with us, gave strong assurance to our forefathers of the faith. They faced hardship and trial, or were about to embark on the greatest challenge of their life; yet, they were assured of God's continued presence." (Thursday's lesson)
14. I have been given say over all things in heaven and on earth. So as you go, make disciples to me from all kinds of people, submerging them in Trinitarian reality, and showing them how to do everything that I commanded you. And I am with you every minute, until the job is done. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

"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.

Then the apostle Paul took up the cause. At first he too obeyed for the wrong reason, for he worshiped a tyrannical god who would be pleased to see people persecuted and imprisoned to force them to obey. See Acts 9:1, 2.

Then he saw the light, and the truth set him free. And who has written more eloquently about freedom, love, and grace, and that faith is the only requirement for heaven, and 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 3:31. "Does faith abolish law? Perish the thought! Faith establishes law, by putting it in its proper perspective." For, adopting Paul's understanding of faith, the man who really knows, loves, and trusts God, 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 custodian, to bring us back to a right relationship with God.

And how we sinners, in our rebelliousness, our immaturity, and disorderliness, have needed the guidance and protection of God's law! {Maxwell, A. Graham. *I Want to be Free*, 29-30. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970}

Lou: When Jesus said, and we have this text in our Bible reference sheet from Matthew 11: "Come to me all you who labor and I will give you rest." But then He talks about listening and obedience. He says, "My yoke is easy." Is this really easy? Is it light?

Graham: When in comparison with the many, many rules and regulations they had, which made no sense, it was very light. And yet Jesus says, "You have omitted the weightier matters in the law." So in a sense, it's heavy. What is love? Is it weighty and heavy in its importance? It's very important. I think what makes God's Commandments light is that they make such good sense. They call for our intelligent obedience, and when I obey something intelligently, I want to do it. It makes sense. It's dumb not to. Then the burden is gone. I think it's in that sense that it actually calls for complete commitment, isn't it? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #12 with Lou Venden, "God's Law Is No Threat To Our Freedom" recorded April, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>

Do you know the word "obedience" in the Greek (and one can't press the etymological meaning of the word too far) means literally "listening under, humble willingness to listen." A doorkeeper is called by this word. Now if you had a doorkeeper who said, "I'm listening, but I don't intend to carry through with what I hear—I hear you calling, but I'm not going to open the door." This isn't just an idle, rude willingness to listen; it's a *humble* willingness to listen. So when the doorkeeper listens, he hears his master knock, and he proceeds to open the door. Hence the word came to mean "obedience", but the essence of the word is "a willingness to listen."

Now does God expect of us perfect performance? He knows better. Can He expect of us perfect willingness to listen? What if we have a 25-percent reservation here? Then we're not safe to save. I mean we've got a lot of listening to do in the hereafter. So God can demand obedience in this sense, a willingness to listen. And without it He can't help us. And He says, "All the good things that have come to you have come by hearing; by a willingness to listen, in a mood of trust." That's all that is asked. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, *Galatians*, #3, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/3MMGALATIANS66>

Rote, mechanical, legalistic, unthinking obedience implies a rote, mechanical, unthinking, legalistic, arbitrary God. And those who God chose to be His spokesmen to the world turned out to be the most serious perverters of the truth. To the extent that, when Christ came to set them right and give them a correct picture of God, it was His family, His Sabbath-keeping saints in the Promised Land, who killed Him rather than accept the truth. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, #3, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*
<http://pkp.cc/3MMGALATIANS66>

Did Paul become a man of less conviction, of less forcefulness afterwards? Remember, it's after Damascus that he says, "If even an angel from Heaven should disagree with my gospel, let him be accursed." That's a good point, he didn't change on this. And he worked just as hard afterwards. But he no longer judged and condemned people; he wouldn't think of persecuting people. Remember in Romans he says, "Who are you to judge anybody else? It's none of your business. Each one of us will give an account of himself to God." Before Damascus, he passed judgment, he condemned, he hailed them to prison.

So a great change in his treatment of people. He still was a hard-working evangelist, but he had changed his gospel. Did he not have the devil's picture of God before Damascus? Did he not worship a God who was arbitrary, unforgiving and severe? Isn't it true that our conception of God determines how we treat people? Most particularly the way we seek to win people to what we understand to be the truth, really reveals the kind of person we believe our God to be. Now Paul switches gospels, actually. I suspect he talked about the gospel many times. You know, the gospel was preached to the people of Israel in the wilderness. He knew that. But he had been deceived by Satan into a false picture of God, and he was teaching a false gospel. Now after Damascus and the 14 years of reflection and study, he says, "I've thought this thing through and I've studied this through to the point where I can say I'd stake my life on it. If even an angel from Heaven should come with a different gospel, especially that one I used to preach, he's wrong." So Paul had seen both sides. The interesting thing is though, he had completely changed his gospel without changing the day on which he kept his Sabbath, or his tithe-paying, or his health-reforming, or any of those things.

Would it be possible then, for a devout Seventh-day Adventist to be in church this Sabbath, faithfully having paid a double tithe, and nothing forbidden in his stomach; he'd strained the gnats out of his goat's milk, but he's on the devil's side in the great controversy? And he could come back the next Sabbath and be on God's side, coming the same day, eating the same food, wearing the same clothes. This is why it's very hard to judge. Is there any way to tell whether a person is a legalist or a man of faith? Whether a man has the picture of God that Jesus presented, or the picture of God that Saul used to think he got from the Old Testament; and he

could quote many verses for it. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, #2, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/2MMGALATIANS66>*

Further Study with Ellen White

When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself. Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie—to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to *choose* another master; for we are always free to do this. But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe. Nothing can pluck us out of His hand. In constantly beholding Him, we “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18. {SC 72.1}

Jesus looked upon the distressed and heart-burdened, those whose hopes were blighted, and who with earthly joys were seeking to quiet the longing of the soul, and He invited all to find rest in Him. {LHU 97.2}

Tenderly He bade the toiling people, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). {LHU 97.3}

Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be open for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon your Burden Bearer. {LHU 97.7}

Jesus calls us to Himself not simply to refresh us with His grace and presence for a few hours, and then to send us forth from His light to walk apart from Him in sadness and gloom. No, no. He tells us that we must abide with Him and He with us. Wherever His work is to be done He is present—tender, loving, and compassionate. He has prepared for you and me an abiding dwelling place in Himself. He is our refuge. {TMK 45.4}

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}

Satan had clothed the Father in his own attributes, but Christ represented Him in His true character of benevolence and love. In the character in which Christ presented Him to the world it was as if He gave a new gift to man. . . . {LHU 36.4}

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}

When Christ ascended to the Father, He did not leave His followers without help. The Holy Spirit, as His representative, and the heavenly angels, as ministering spirits, are sent forth to aid

those who against great odds are fighting the good fight of faith. Ever remember that Jesus is your helper. No one understands as well as He your peculiarities of character. He is watching over you, and if you are willing to be guided by Him, He will throw around you influences for good that will enable you to accomplish all His will for you. {AG 196.2}

The Lord Jesus acts through the Holy Spirit; for it is His representative. Through it He infuses spiritual life into the soul, quickening its energies for good, cleansing it from moral defilement, and giving it a fitness for His kingdom. Jesus has large blessings to bestow, rich gifts to distribute among men. He is the wonderful Counselor, infinite in wisdom and strength; and if we will acknowledge the power of His Spirit, and submit to be molded by it, we shall stand complete in Him. {AG 196.4}