

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Second Quarter 2016: *The Book of Matthew*
Lesson 9 “Idols of the Soul (and Other Lessons From Jesus)”

Read for this week’s study

Ecclesiastes 9:10; Matthew 18:1–4; Matthew 18:21–35; 19:16–30; Galatians. 3:21, 22; Matthew 19:27.

Memory Text

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ ” (Matthew 18:1, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Greatness of Humility
- III. The Greatness of Forgiveness
- IV. Idols of the Soul
- V. What’s In It for Us?
- VI. “We Are Able”
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “As human beings, we are products of our environment, of our culture. These greatly shape our values, beliefs, and attitudes. [...] The culture, the environment that you grew up in has greatly made you what you are. [...] Unfortunately, to some degree, most of our environments and cultures work against the principles of God’s kingdom. The world, after all, is a fallen world, and its values, morals, and customs often reflect that fallen state. What else would they reflect? It’s just so hard for us to see because we are so immersed in our culture and environment.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. “The work of God in our hearts is, among other things, to point us to the values, morals, and standards of God’s kingdom. As we will see this week, those values, morals, and standards often greatly differ from what we have been born into and reared in. The disciples had to learn these lessons; we do too.” (Sabbath afternoon)
3. “To define true greatness, Jesus called a child to stand before Him and said that ‘whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’ (vs. 4, NKJV). Jesus didn’t talk about being a great preacher, or a great businessman, or even a great philanthropist. Greatness, in the sight of God, is what

we are inside, not what we do externally, though no doubt what's inside will impact what we do externally." (Sunday's lesson)

4. The weakest, most vulnerable, least significant human being you can think of is the clearest possible signpost to what the Kingdom of God is like. God's rule on earth is not about the survival of the fittest. It is not a process in which the strongest, the fastest, the loudest people get to the front ahead of everyone else.
5. "Let's face it: it's easier to go behind someone's back and complain about him or her than to go directly to the person and deal with the issue. And that is precisely why we don't want to do it, despite being told to do it by the Lord." (Monday's lesson)
6. "The beautiful work of Redemption begins with humbly doing the right thing and talking directly with someone who has hurt you. This, too, would be another example of greatness in those who do it." (Tuesday's lesson) What about giving/telling the person "the last 10%" of truth?
7. "[When he says in Mathew 18:21-35 that we are] to 'forgive seventy times seven', Jesus is serious about the necessity of forgiveness, not only for others' benefit but for our own." (Monday's lesson)
8. What is the meaning of the story of the rich young ruler (19:16-30)? "The gospel needs to penetrate the heart, to go right to the idols of the soul, and whatever we are holding onto that's an impediment to our relationship to God needs to be gone." (Tuesday's lesson)
9. Jesus, instead of giving more complex legal instructions, gives the simplest of commands: sell all, give it away and follow me (cf. 5:48). In order to be complete, you must be empty; to have everything, you must have nothing; to be fully signed up to God's service, you must be signed off from everything else.
10. Notice, that just as with the previous comments about celibacy, this command was not given to everybody. Jesus wants all to be free, but we all have different "idols of the soul".
11. "Peter seems to be implying that, unlike this [rich young] man and others who either rejected Jesus or stayed with Him a while and then left, he and the other disciples had left all for Him. They were remaining faithful to Him, even at great personal cost. Thus, [Peter's] question is, What's in it for us?" (Wednesday's lesson)
12. "Notice, Jesus didn't rebuke Peter for selfishness or the like. He gave him first a very straightforward answer and then the parable regarding the workers and their wages (19:28-20:16)." (Wednesday's lesson)
13. The last story is Mathew 20:20-27. "James and John, the Sons of Thunder, were still clearly more worried about their own future than about the salvation of those around them, even after they had been sent out to evangelize the surrounding areas. In its own way, this story is somewhat like what we looked at yesterday, with Peter's question regarding what they could get by following Jesus." (Thursday's

lesson) What does this teach us about the nature of power and relationships in Christ's community?

14. The Old Testament prophets speak about the 'cup of Jahveh's wrath' (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15-29; etc.). The shock of this passage is that Jesus speaks of drinking the cup himself. The disciples are eager to become rich and famous, bent on power, position and prestige. They were in danger of becoming like the arrogant rulers of the world, the people that the gospel was meant to overthrow. Jesus sets free ('ransoms') those enslaved in sin and wickedness and also those in the grips of the lust for power and position (like James and John and us). He still does that today!

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

One of the evidences that one is growing up is that one is not becoming arrogant. There's nothing more stubborn than a little child. "My Daddy says it, and he's bigger than your Daddy, and therefore it's true." I would say it would be a mark of immaturity for a person of advanced years to be so self-satisfied and so arrogantly stubborn about his opinions. That suggests one is still a child.

One grows up. One even enhances this quality of a child, the humility, the willingness to listen, to accept correction, to accept instruction. That should become even greater as one gets older.

So an arrogant, "I think I've almost made it now," suggests one may not have even started. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #18, "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up" recorded June, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/18MMCAG>*

It is significant to note that the Greek word for "obedience" in the New Testament means basically "a willingness to listen." If we should wish to test the genuineness of our own faith, we must look to find within ourselves a complete willingness to listen, to learn, to do whatever God reveals to us. If it is not there, then there is no faith. And without faith a man cannot be saved, for he is not safe to save. He cannot be trusted. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, 83-84. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

This long debate between faith, works and obedience has troubled saints through the years, but it could be so readily resolved if we looked at the biblical word for obedience. I'll even pronounce it (because it's like that other word; faith, is *hupostasis*.) This word obedience is *hupakoe*. The first part "hupa" means under. And the second part "akoe" means hearing. The word means literally, "listening under." *A humble willingness to listen*, and of course if we love and trust God we'll be willing to listen. It wouldn't make sense for us to *not* listen to one we

love, trust and admire. Now could God's expectation of our willingness to listen be one hundred percent? Our performance may be weak. We may stumble as we leave our doctor's office. But a willingness to listen? Is it too much to say, "Don't cheat there. Let that be one hundred percent!" If it should seem that God is too demanding in asking for such a relationship, that he expects too much of us, it surely is encouraging to read about the heroes and heroines of faith celebrated in the same chapter of the same book that tells us what faith is. Look at Hebrews 11:31 and following:

By faith the prostitute Rahab escaped the doom of the unbelievers, because she had given the spies a kindly welcome. Need I say more? Time is too short for me to tell the stories of Gideon [who needed a wet fleece, and a dry one], Barak, Samson [look what he did], and Jephthah, David [look what he did], and Samuel and the prophets. . . . These also, one and all are commemorated for their faith. (NEB)

Is God too demanding? He even holds those people with all their weaknesses, with all their faults and sins; he holds them out to us as people, evidently, who were willing to listen, loved and trusted God and were waiting for him to heal the damage done. And he puts them in Hebrews eleven for our encouragement. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #3, "All God Asks is Trust" recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/3MMCAG>

Nobody's going to be saved without the clean heart and the right spirit. Forgiveness doesn't get us into heaven. That's legalism. Heaven will not be peopled with pardoned crooks, but with people who have new hearts and right spirits; and we don't have to use just this verse, but how about what Jesus said to Nicodemus? He didn't say, "Nicodemus, unless you be officially pardoned, you'll not get into the Kingdom." He said, "Unless you have a new heart and right spirit, and be reborn, you'll not see the Kingdom." That runs all through the Bible. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – 2 Samuel, recorded November, 1983, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/15MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/16MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

When do you think the prodigal son really came to know his father, and the kindness of his father led him to real repentance? Don't you think it's after he discovered he'd been forgiven? Which comes first, forgiveness or repentance? In a sense, the forgiveness is offered, and some of us are won by that to repentance. If we're legalists, you have to do it all in the right order, you know, or God can't do it. He's not that kind of a God. He wants us to come home, not

willing that any of his children should be lost, but that all should come to repentance. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Luke*, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/55MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/56MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

If you had been in God's place on that day in Eden when Adam and Eve first sinned, what would you have done with them?

Would you have forgiven them and offered at least one more chance to stay in the garden? Human parents do this every day for their disobedient children. Since God is love, why was Adam banished on his first offense? (See Genesis 3.)

The wrong answer to this question can seriously affect one's attitude toward God and one's practice of religion.

Many believe that God has long been angry with the human race, most reluctant to forgive and bless His erring creatures. For thousands of years men have offered sacrifice—sometimes their children—to win the favor of an offended god. Even in the Christian world some teach that, were it not for constant intercession, God could not find it in His heart to love and save us sinners.

But need we do anything to make God love us?

Nothing is more emphatic in Scripture than that God has always loved—even His most wayward child. When God said, "In the day that you eat of it, you shall die," He was uttering no arbitrary threat. In love for His creatures, He was only warning of the consequence of rebellion.

Sin so changes the sinner that it actually results in death. Separated from the Source of life, he will surely die. Out of harmony with his Creator he can no longer endure the glory of His presence. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, 68-69. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

What was the theology prevailing at that time? When a man was poor, was he blessed? No, the reason why he was poor was that he was not blessed. And why was he not blessed? Because he was not good. Do you remember in Job? So long as Job was prosperous, they knew he was a good man, but when he lost everything, the three theologians came and said, "You must have done something very bad, because if you are good, you are blessed. If you are bad, you are punished. And the greatest evidence of blessing is prosperity. "This is why Jesus stunned them when he said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they said, "Well, if a rich man can't be saved, who can be?"

Because if you are rich, you are blessed; and if you are blessed, you are good. So what Jesus said to them was, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a good man to be saved." That's the way they read it. That's why they were so puzzled by it. But of course their theology was wrong, and the Book of Job is to show it. Job was good, but he lost everything, and he remained good. But his friends had this system all neatly worked out. The more virtuous you are, the more you are blessed. The more you're blessed, the more you'll prosper. So the richer you are, the gooder you are. Well, hasn't that prevailed through the years? The rich can do no wrong, and so on. They're blessed. And they have tyrannized the poor sometimes because of this. But can you imagine Jesus saying, "Blessed are you poor." And they said, "What do you mean, we are blessed?" We are poor because we are bad. Because if we were good, we would be blessed, and if we were blessed we would be rich. So "Blessed are you poor," "Happy are you poor"? That made no sense at all. You see his audience was more inclined to go with the three friends who came to Job. They preferred that theology. Jesus was siding more with Job. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Intertestament Period & Matthew*, recorded March, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/51MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/52MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God. {DA 173.1}

It is impossible for finite minds to comprehend the work of redemption. Its mystery exceeds human knowledge; yet he who passes from death to life realizes that it is a divine reality. The beginning of redemption we may know here through a personal experience. Its results reach through the eternal ages. {DA 173.2}

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, quickens 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 fulfil 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 disciples that the Christian becomes like his Master in character. He has clearer, broader views. His discernment is more penetrative, his judgment better balanced. So quickened is he by the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness, that he is enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God. {GW 285.3}

It is the Spirit that causes to shine into darkened minds the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness; that makes men's hearts burn within them with an awakened realization of the truths of eternity; that presents before the mind the great standard of righteousness, and convinces of sin; that inspires faith in Him who alone can save from sin; that works to transform character by withdrawing the affections of men from those things which are temporal and perishable, and fixing them upon the eternal inheritance. The Spirit recreates, refines, and sanctifies human beings, fitting them to become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. {GW 286.3}

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}

He who places himself unreservedly under the guidance of the Spirit of God, will find that his mind expands and develops. He obtains an education in the service of God which is not one-sided and deficient, developing a one-sided character, but one which results in symmetry and completeness. {1SM 338.2}

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}

But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy. So in every soul wherein Christ, the hope of glory, dwells, His words are re-echoed, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8. {MB 109.2}

The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness, seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression. {1SM 235.1}

Love, the basis of creation and of redemption, is the basis of true education. This is made plain in the law that God has given as the guide of life. The first and great commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Mark 12:30. To love Him, the Infinite, the Omniscient One, with the whole strength and mind and heart, means the highest development of every power. It means that in the whole being—the body, the mind, as well as the soul—the image of God is to be restored. {CT 32.1}

Like the first is the second commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Mark 12:31. The law of love calls for the devotion of body, mind, and soul to the service of God and our fellow men. And this service, while making us a blessing to others, brings the greatest blessing to ourselves. Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. {CT 32.2}

God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us. Yet these but imperfectly represent His love. Though all these evidences have been given, the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. {SC 10.3}

When one surrenders to Christ, the mind is brought under the control of the law; but it is the royal law, which proclaims liberty to every captive. By becoming one with Christ, man is made free. Subjection to the will of Christ means restoration to perfect manhood. {MH 131.1}