

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2016: *The Role of the Church in the Community*

Lesson 3 “Justice and Mercy in the Old Testament: Part 1”

Read for this week’s study

Exodus 22:21–23, 23:2–9; Amos 8:4–7; Isaiah 1:13–17, 58:1–14; Acts 20:35.

Memory Text

“He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow” (Psalm 146:7–9, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Mercy and Justice: Earmarks of God’s People
- III. Universal Concerns
- IV. Prophetic Voice: Part 1
- V. Prophetic Voice: Part 2
- VI. A Force for Good
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “[God’s] character is expressed in the memory verse. As transformed members of His church, we must reflect that character. If we are truly His, we will passionately care about and provide for the poor and the powerless.” (Sabbath afternoon) Surely. And what about the rich? Should someone passionately care about the top 10,000 in society? If our mission is to every kindred, nation, tongue and people, doesn’t that include everyone?
2. “Social justice is God’s original intention for human society: a world in which basic needs are met, people flourish, and peace reigns.” (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Sin never remains on a personal level. It starts that way, but soon goes from moral to ethical, from personal to public. By the end of the first book in the Bible, sin becomes systemic, embedded in the structures of the society. Sin moves from the individual to society: From a garden to the entire globe. Sin moves from individual people, from interpersonal conflict to create for itself a global empire that is in

- defiance to God. What is significant about that process and how can we best deal with it? Should the church become a global empire?
4. “If we truly observe the Sabbath, we will not remain satisfied with only our own rest (Exodus 23:12), redemption (Deuteronomy 5:12–15), and ultimate restoration in the new earth (Isaiah 66:22, 23). Indeed, the seventh-day Sabbath tells us that God is the Creator and Rest Provider of all who live on this earth. The universality of the Sabbath rest implies a commonality among all of us, rich or poor. The common Fatherhood of God means a common equality and concern among human beings.” (Monday’s lesson) Can you rightly observe the Sabbath if you believe that you are better, that God loves you more than somebody else?
 5. “God wants His people to express His characteristics of mercy and justice as part of the ideal behavior of His people. The Hebrew prophets often spoke up on behalf of the needy, calling God’s people to repentance for misrepresenting His concern for the marginalized and oppressed. In fact, God equates selfless redemptive behavior with true worship.” (Tuesday’s lesson) Does it mean that those who help others, who live selfless lives, are worshiping the true God even though they may be professed atheists? What are the implications here?
 6. “The prophetic voice of God’s servants rang loudest when His people made extravagant efforts to worship but did not reflect God’s compassion for the suffering of those around them.” (Tuesday’s lesson) How is it possible for religious worship to blind people in such a way that what they do and how they treat others seems to lose importance to them?
 7. God warned His people that once they came to the Promised Land, their greatest danger would be to forget their story. The history of Israel shows that those who were oppressed in Egypt became oppressors themselves in just a few generations!
 8. Is it possible today for a restoration movement that at first was interested in discovering new perspectives on old Bible truths, teachings and practices, to be simply replicating itself now, more interested in protecting the institution and its own traditions? Is there anything that can be done to prevent that outcome? Or since it happened to Israel, to the medieval church, to orthodox Protestantism, is it inevitable that it will happen also to Adventism?
 9. What is the significance of Isaiah 58:2-14 in understanding our mission, and understanding the danger that worship can easily become self-centered?
 10. Business grows best when it is customer oriented. What is the lesson of operating from the principle of scarcity or abundance?
 11. “Having the truth, however wonderful, is not enough. In Isaiah 58, God’s people were passionate about their religious forms and practices and yet weak in applying their faith in a practical manner.” (Thursday’s lesson) What kind of self-deception brings this outcome? How do you defend against it?
 12. “God is calling His church today to be a force for good, echoing the call of the Old Testament prophets to demonstrate the truth about His character.” (Thursday’s lesson) What does it mean to be God’s prophetic movement in the 21st century? Is it possible that the Church is where it is because we do not “hear the cry” anymore,

that we have forgotten our own story and determine our own agenda instead of caring for the things God cares about? God is still looking for a body that will represent and model His values to the broken world today. Imagine if he had a community like that!

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Graham: Ah, they're hazardous. All illustrations are hazardous, so we need several, which is the Bible way. There are many, many. They sort of cover each other's little vulnerable parts.

Lou: But what about some of these others? The "satisfying of justice," and "the demands of the law?"

Graham: Ah, those are the strongest ones. He died to satisfy the demands of the law. Now, what does the law demand? Well, the law seems to demand our love, which can't be demanded anyway. There's no way you can command love. And yet as Paul says, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Jesus said the same. Moses said the same. So does the law say, "You either love God, and love each other, or you will be executed in the most painful way known to our Heavenly Father"? Some of our good Christian friends live under the awful weight of believing that God has said, "You either love and obey me, or you will be tortured in sulfurous flames for eternity." That such good folk can still love God is a real tribute to them, not to God. I mean this is an awesome burden to live under. And yet because they love Jesus, they still love and are still faithful. And they will be in the Kingdom. And I think Jesus will love to introduce such people to the Father. He'll say, "Would you like to meet the Father?" And they'll say, "Well, if you will go with us." He says, "There's no need, but I'll go with you."

And what a marvelous surprise to millions of these people, to meet the Father in the Kingdom, and discover that he is just as loving and gracious as the Son.

But "under the demands of law." That belongs to a very legal conception of what has gone wrong in the universe, which we discussed in our second conversation. In that view, what has gone wrong is that we have "broken the rules," and the law demands that God execute us for breaking the rules. And Jesus died so that somehow God could justly forgive us even though we have broken the rules.

I don't think we have been able to make too much sense out of that. But it goes along with the other one, "satisfying justice." Whose justice? I have friends who say, "If God does not give Idi Amin several days in the fire, I will not regard him as a just God." They have that feeling about the satisfaction of justice. And I think they really mean it, and I would respect them for that. I would love to relieve them of that burden. If I want to know why Jesus died, I should go right to

the cross and watch him die and hear his cry and see how the Father is involved, and then fit that back into Scripture. I don't see him fulfilling the requirements of a legal model.

Lou: It's part of our problem, then, that we are taking models from our legal system here and trying to apply them to God.

Graham: That's a very good point, very much so. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #8 with Lou Venden, "The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence" recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/8MMCAG>*

The idea that sin should be understood as a breach of faith, a breakdown of trust, is not of primary concern to servants—that is, to servants as Jesus depicted them in John 15:15.

Servants, he explained to his disciples, "do not know their master's business." They feel it is none of their business to understand what their master is doing. Their duty is to do what they're told, and obey the rules—whether they agree with them or not.

Believers who think and act like such servants tend to be preoccupied with their legal standing with their Lord and Master, how to please him, and how to stay out of trouble. Sin is seen primarily as the breaking of the rules.

It is their understanding that by committing such transgression they will incur the wrath of God and find themselves in serious legal trouble. Unless something is done to remove their guilt, legal penalties will be imposed. And for the slightest infraction of the rules, the penalty is nothing less than painful execution—or even eternal torture.

Some servant-believers are so accustomed to this kind of government that they fervently defend it, all in the name of justice, as they understand that term. They will concede that in civilized courts of law, justice never justifies torture. But in God's government?

"Well," the servant says, "who are you to question his inscrutable ways? As a good and faithful servant, just bow your head and believe. Such fearsome treatment at the hands of God is not only the right but also the loving thing to do."

I heard someone say this again just the other day. He was the kind of believer who surely qualifies as a "good and faithful servant."

"God," he went on to explain, "is required by law, by justice, and by the holiness of his own character and government, not only to destroy those who oppose his will, but first to painfully punish them for an appropriate length of time."

When I asked him how he could consider such inhuman punishment the loving thing to do, he replied, “Don’t you believe the Scriptures? The Bible says God is love. That means that even if it doesn’t make sense to us, anything God does must be the loving thing to do.” It made me think again of that famous bumper sticker. (“God said it! I believe it! That settles it!”) {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 108-109. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter8.html>

The classic view of the Moral Influence Theory goes back to a man by the name of Abelard in the eleventh century who taught the point of view that Christ came as a human and lived and died, not to make it possible for God to forgive us, for that was never a problem with God, but to demonstrate his love and so to win us back. The emphasis was on love. Now there are some who feel that this great controversy view that we represent simply is to emphasize God’s love. But it’s so much more than that. It includes much more. And so I would suggest that to call this larger, great controversy view the Moral Influence Theory is utterly erroneous and inadequate. Because in the larger, great controversy view, we recognize the issues before the universe—the questions about our God: Is it true that sin results in death? But is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God? And why does God not want us to be afraid? Is it true that the obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel? These other theologians never, ever dealt with those issues. The great controversy view is far larger than any other. And I notice that there are those who sometimes caricature, perhaps, our understanding of the plan of salvation as Moral Influence Theory. Without exception so far, they do not acknowledge a great controversy over the character and government of God.

And more than that, they understand that what went wrong in the universe is a legal problem, that what went wrong is we’re in legal trouble with our God and he is legally bound to destroy us in his righteous justice. And that Jesus died to make it legally possible for God to forgive.

We have discussed before what went wrong in the universe. I believe what went wrong was a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness, and Christ had to come to answer all these questions, not with words but with painful, costly demonstration, for trust and trustworthiness to be restored. This is a far larger view and should not rightfully be called Moral Influence Theory.

There is another aspect of this that is very significant. Is sin only a legal problem, or does sin affect you morally? Do you need to be forgiven and have a new heart and a right spirit? So in that sense there is a moral aspect in the great controversy view. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #9, “There is No Need to be Afraid of God” recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>

God had told the truth when he warned that the wages of sin is death. In his Son he was dying that death. But God was not executing his Son. He only “gave him up,” as he will give up the wicked at the end. And though by rights we should have died, God did not ask us to prove the truthfulness of his word. He sacrificed himself in his Son.

What more could God do to warn us of our sin and win us back to faith? Surely he had shown himself infinitely worthy of our trust.

God’s own character had been called in question before the universe. His warning that the wages of sin is death had been ridiculed in Eden. But not so anymore. Christ’s death had clearly demonstrated the righteousness of God (see Romans 3:25, 26). God was shown to be right in what he had said (see Romans 3:4).

Christ died primarily to prove the righteousness of God in the great controversy.

As Paul explains, “God showed him publicly dying as a sacrifice of reconciliation to be taken advantage of through faith. This was to vindicate his own justice (for in his forbearance, God passed over men’s former sins)—to vindicate his justice at the present time, and show that he is upright himself, and that he makes those who have faith in Jesus upright also” (Romans 3:25, 26, Goodspeed).

With this supreme demonstration of God’s righteousness all questions about his character and government were settled throughout the universe. God had won his case. The issues in the great controversy had been clearly seen.

Only here on this planet were there any remaining doubts about God. Only here did anyone still believe that Satan might be right. {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 82-83. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-08>

Lou: I suppose part of the problem has been that tendency for us to focus on our own salvation. You have referred to that, how it certainly is important, but that it needs to be seen—must be seen, in the larger perspective. What I’m wondering is, how does this perspective affect Christian belief in general? It makes a difference?

Graham: Yes, I think it doesn’t minimize our Christian beliefs; it makes them more significant. And I mentioned the gospel takes on a much broader meaning. But, take a number of the things we believe: some of us regard the Sabbath as a privilege to observe, and a great blessing. Well, in the narrower view—that is, I don’t want to sound disrespectful to anybody, but in the view that is preoccupied with what God has done for our own salvation and what God has done for this planet—and how grateful we are that he’s done it! But if you limit your understanding to

this planet, then the Sabbath was given before sin. And then, you see, why would you keep it? Because it's a mere test of our obedience. And many people explain the Sabbath as a mere test of our obedience, to show God's authority and test our willingness to obey. But in the larger view, the Sabbath was given to man *after* sin entered the universe. And then it's no longer an arbitrary test of obedience; it's a great gift that God gave to us to remind us of all the things that the Bible describes as being associated with the Sabbath. Think of the freedom and the perfection of Eden, and the freedom that he gave us. And then the rescue in the Exodus. And then the events of crucifixion week. The seventh-day Sabbath is connected with all of those. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #1 with Lou Venden, "The Conflict in God's Family" 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/1MMCAG>

To me, that's the whole purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is designed to remind us of the truth about God that is the basis of our trust. It's not a test of obedience. It's not a burden—it's been made one! It was given to man. Remember Mark 2:27? The Sabbath was made for us, to help us, because more than at any other time we need to be reminded of the truth that was not claimed, but revealed and demonstrated during creation week, and during crucifixion week.

Incidentally, that first Sabbath, was that our seventh day? It was our second day. Sometimes we say we should worship every seventh day because it's built into our system that we need to rest every seventh day. If that's a good argument, then on which day should we rest? Which is our seventh day? Thursday! I don't know anybody who chooses Thursday. Friday yes, Saturday yes, Sunday yes. But this would start a whole new movement. If we're supposed to rest on the seventh day, our seventh day is Thursday. God's seventh day, with the universe watching, their seventh day, earth time, is the one that follows all those revealing events of creation week. That's when God and the universe celebrated. And then God says, "I want you to do the same from here on, not to be a burden and a test of obedience; you need this. The controversy is on; you need to be reminded once a week of the evidence I have presented, and there will be much more coming." When we get to Deuteronomy, it will say that the Sabbath is to remind us of the exodus from Egypt, remember, when we get there. That's more evidence that God set his people free when they lost their freedom. Always the Sabbath says something about God, and hopefully that's what we think about on that day. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 - Genesis, recorded October, 1981, 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/1MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Right behavior and the truth about God always go together, for most significant reasons. But you notice how they're always associated here. When people are very religious but have a wrong picture of God, it may totally pervert what it is they're doing, and even their Sabbath keeping could become a curse to them rather than a blessing—a burden and a wall between them and other people in the world. And Ephesians and Colossians talk about eliminating that artificial wall. The Sabbath was never supposed to be a barrier. The Sabbath should remind us that we're all members of the same family. Isn't that true? Every seventh-day Sabbath we should realize that everybody on this planet—Catholics, heathen, Seventh-day Adventists—trace their lineage back to the same beginning. The Sabbath is the great leveler, the great unifier in the whole human race. The Sabbath was never meant to be a barrier. But when it becomes a sign that we are the one true people, it can become more of a barrier and even something we wear with a false kind of a pride. We have to watch that with great care. I think Sabbath keeping, without a true picture of God, may do us more harm than good.

Evidence of that? Once again, the people who crucified Christ rushed home to get ready to keep a seventh-day Sabbath holy. It seems insane. That's because they didn't have a true picture of God. Jesus said, "If only you knew my Father, you would have recognized me and you wouldn't be trying to kill me." You remember his words there in John 8, which we'll come to later. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 - Isaiah, recorded 1981, 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 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/33MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/34MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

How about in Hebrews 4 where the Sabbath is a foretaste of the Sabbath-like rest to come. A rest that even begins in this life when we begin to trust God and let him be the Physician, the one to heal the damage done, instead of trying to heal ourselves. Remember, we read earlier that when Israel entered Canaan, they didn't enter into God's rest. When we realize the kind of Person God is, as he has revealed in such dramatic ways, we are reminded of that every time we keep the seventh-day Sabbath. When we realize what he's like and we like what we see, and we trust him, we enter into the Sabbath-like rest in this life, and when the earth is re-created and given back to God's children, we will enter fully into the Sabbath-like rest to come. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 - Deuteronomy, recorded November, 1981, 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/9MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/10MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

He spoke a word of sympathy here and a word there as He saw men weary and compelled to bear heavy burdens. He shared their burdens and repeated to them the lessons He had learned from nature, of the love, the kindness, the goodness of God. He sought to inspire with hope the most rough and unpromising, setting before them the assurance that they might become blameless and harmless, attaining such a character as would make them manifest as children of God. . . . Jesus sat an honored guest at the table of the publicans, by His sympathy and social kindness showing that He recognized the dignity of humanity; and men longed to become worthy of His confidence. Upon their thirsty souls His words fell with blessed, life-giving power. New impulses were awakened, and the possibility of a new life opened to these outcasts of society. {HP 181.3}

In His every word and act were revealed tender compassion, love, and mercy. The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach Him. He always noticed the little children, and they were attracted to Him. {UL 145.3}

The Lord declares by His prophet, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: *therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*" Jeremiah 31:3. While the sinner is yet far from the Father's house, wasting his substance in a strange country, the Father's heart is yearning over him; and every longing awakened in the soul to return to God is but the tender pleading of His Spirit, wooing, entreating, drawing the wanderer to his Father's heart of love. {SC 54.1}

He attended the great yearly festivals of the nation, and to the multitude absorbed in outward ceremony He spoke of heavenly things, bringing eternity within their view. To all He brought treasures from the storehouse of wisdom. He spoke to them in language so simple that they could not fail of understanding. By methods peculiarly His own, He helped all who were in sorrow and affliction. With tender, courteous grace He ministered to the sin-sick soul, bringing healing and strength. {MH 22.2}

The prince of teachers, He sought access to the people by the pathway of their most familiar associations. He presented the truth in such a way that ever after it was to His hearers intertwined with their most hallowed recollections and sympathies. He taught in a way that made them feel the completeness of His identification with their interests and happiness. His instruction was so direct, His illustrations were so appropriate, His words so sympathetic and cheerful, that His hearers were charmed. The simplicity and earnestness with which He addressed the needy, hallowed every word. {MH 23.1}

The grace of Christ is not confined to a few. The message of mercy and forgiveness brought from heaven by Christ was to be heard by all. Our Saviour says, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12). His blessings are universal, reaching to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples.

Christ came to break down every wall of partition ... that every soul, whether Jew or Gentile, might be a free worshiper and have access to God.... {TMK 98.2}

Through varied channels the heavenly messengers are in active communication with every part of the world, and when man calls upon the Lord with a true and earnest heart, God is represented as bending from His throne above. He listens to every yearning cry, and answers, "Here am I." He raises up the distressed and oppressed. He bestows His blessings on the evil as well as on the good. {TMK 98.3}

The Lord walks among men by His providences, but His stately steppings are not heard, His presence is not discerned, His hand is not recognized. The work of Christ's disciples is to shine as lights, making manifest to the world the character of God. They are to catch the increasing rays of light from the Word of God and reflect them to men enshrouded in the darkness of misapprehension of God. The servants of Christ must rightly represent the character of God and Christ to men. {TMK 98.5}

The condition of many persons calls for the exercise of genuine mercy. Christians, in their dealing with one another, are to be controlled by principles of mercy and love. They are to improve every opportunity for helping fellow beings in distress. . . . {HP 238.3}