

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2018: *Stewardship: Motives of the Heart*

Lesson 7 “Honesty With God”

Read for this week’s study

Luke 16:10; Leviticus 27:30; Genesis 22:1–12; Hebrews 12:2; Luke 11:42; Hebrews 7:2–10, Nehemiah 13.

Memory Text

“ ‘But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience’ ” (Luke 8:15).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. A Matter of Simple Honesty
- III. The Life of Faith
- IV. A Statement of Faith
- V. Honest Tithe: Holy to the Lord
- VI. Revival, Reformation, and Tithing
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “In this week’s lesson we will study the spiritual concept of honesty through the practice of tithing and see why tithing is vitally important to the steward and stewardship.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. “One thing most of us have in common is that we do not like dishonesty. We especially do not like it when we see it manifested in others. It’s not easy, though, to see it in ourselves, and when we do, we tend to rationalize our actions, to justify them, to downplay their significance.” (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Why is honesty so important? What role does it play in our spiritual formation? How does God help us to be honest? What does it mean that we can never fool God?
4. “The religious world still after thousands of years remains astonished at the act of faith displayed by Abraham with Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22). Yet, this act of faith wasn’t something that Abraham just conjured up when he needed it. His life of faithfulness and obedience beforehand was what enabled him to do as he did. Had he often been unfaithful before this event, he never would have passed the test as

he did. There is no question, either, that a man with that kind of faith surely lived it out after the event as well.” (Monday’s lesson)

5. Is this conclusion based on reading the Bible story, or is this a pietistic wish based on “legends from the lives of saints”? Why do people feel compelled to represent the Bible characters in this way? The Bible is very honest in its ‘warts and all’ portrayal of even heroes of faith.
6. There are different ways we can speak about tithing. Often those who see law and grace as sharp contradictions, relegate tithing to the realm of law from which we have been thankfully freed as a relic of legalism. Those who know there is grace in law and law in grace, realize that tithing is actually a vehicle of grace.
7. Tithing is to our possessions what the Sabbath is to our time—a concrete guideline that points beyond itself to the truth that every moment and every part of our lives comes from the hand of God, and will be returned to God. Tithing has always been a training exercise that cultivates a generous and God-centered heart.
8. There were two ways Israel was most obviously distinct in the ancient Mediterranean world: The first would be monotheism. They worshiped one God. The other was their practice of putting voluntary limits on their wealth. They lived in deliberate generosity.
9. Stanford researcher Leon Festinger developed a line of research in social comparison theory. He noted that in different situations we will tend to compare ourselves with people either above or below us, depending on which ladder we’re talking about.
10. For instance, on morality, we tend to compare ourselves with people we think are below us: mass murderers, drug dealers. On the topic of money, we compare ourselves to people above us, those who have more than we do. Research shows that a tendency for upward financial comparisons generates increasing amounts of greed and decreasing amounts of compassion.
11. But ancient financial practices in Israel discouraged upward financial comparisons. Tithing was a reminder that all human beings were created with a need to give. Tithing is in fact God’s great tool to create generous people.
12. God’s grace and generosity so overwhelmed the early church, at least for a time, that people often went far beyond tithe. The privilege of stewardship took precedence over the right of ownership. Therefore the strong were helping the weak.
13. We live in a world where community is often destroyed by creating and emphasizing differences and inequalities. The strong oppress the weak. Power is misused to harass and abuse. God’s church can be one of God’s answers to the community-shattering forces at work in the world. God invites his church family to establish community and to model it with His kind of love, minimizing differences and striving for equality among its participants (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

But when Jesus came, he found a group of people who were totally preoccupied with God's laws and with obedience to their every detail. He never had to tell them not to make a graven image. They had learned their lesson in the discipline of Babylonian captivity, and they never sank into ordinary idolatry again. He never had to tell them which day was the Sabbath. They regarded it as their highest duty to obey all ten of the Ten Commandments. He never had to urge them to pay tithes. Matthew records they used to tithe even the tiniest things: the seeds of the mint, anise, and cumin. Nor did Jesus have to tell them they should obey the laws of hygiene. He commented on the fact that they would even strain gnats out of their goat's milk lest they should eat a forbidden insect. Nor did he ever have to tell them to search the Scriptures. He said they did it all the time—though they did it for the wrong reason (John 5:39). Nor did he ever have to tell them to be careful in their association with unbelievers. In fact, when they came in from the market place, they used to wash themselves in certain special, ceremonial ways, lest they be contaminated by association with the Gentiles. You see, they all could say, like the rich young ruler, "All these things we have obeyed from our youth up."

You would think that in the face of such rigorous obedience and willingness to do precisely what they were told—you would think Jesus would be pleased, and they would recognize and welcome him when he came. But all heaven watched the incredible scene of those who claimed to love God's law, denouncing the Lawgiver as a lawbreaker. It must have puzzled the angels a great deal. So Jesus ventured to suggest that while they were working so hard to obey, that actually they were obeying for the wrong reason. Because they were obeying for the wrong reason, they really were not obeying at all. You can imagine how offensive this was to them. In fact, he went further and suggested that if only they knew the God who had given the law, they would keep the law for an entirely different reason: a reason that would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12, "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>*

What is this truth in which we simply must be settled and sealed, so that despite the devil's most convincing efforts to the contrary, we cannot be moved? What would you suggest for the list of truths? Is it the truth that God exists and that he is infinitely powerful? Well, the devils believe that and it scares them. Is it the truth that the end is coming soon? Satan agrees that it is coming soon and he works all the harder. He is settled into those two things. Is it the truth that the seventh-day is the Sabbath? Is it the truth that we should keep all ten of the Ten Commandments, that we should read our Bibles faithfully as God's word? Is it the truth that we

should pay a careful tithe and be very careful about what we eat and be very careful how we associate with sinners who might lead us astray? Not to minimize those matters.

Should we not recall, as a warning, the very pious beliefs and practices of those who nailed Jesus to the cross and then rushed home to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, with their tithe paid up and no forbidden food in their stomachs? Evidently the truth into which we must be sealed is far more than just the list of beliefs I mentioned, important as they are.

Throughout the Bible, the all-important truth, the saving truth, is above all else the truth about our God. Jesus came to bring us this truth about his Father, so that we might be won back to God in love and trust. God can heal and save all who trust him. You remember all that Jesus said in the verses from John 14, above. When the Spirit comes, he will bring to our remembrance the things that Jesus has said about the Father. Remember in Ephesians 1:17 above, the Holy Spirit will come so that we may know God better. That's the consistent picture of the truth, the subject of the truth, the essence of the truth that runs all through Scripture. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from series, "Conversations About God", #18 - God Waits For His Children To Grow Up, recorded June 1984} {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/18MMCG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Truthfulness and integrity are attributes of God, and he who possesses these qualities possesses a power that is invincible. {ML 331.2}

Christ's followers have no need to try to shine. If they will behold constantly the life of Christ they will be changed in mind and heart into the same image. Then they will shine without any superficial attempt. The Lord asks for no display of goodness. In the gift of His Son He has made provision that our inward lives may be imbued with the principles of heaven. It is the appropriation of this provision that will lead to a manifestation of Christ to the world. When the people of God experience the new birth, their honesty, their uprightness, their fidelity, their steadfast principles, will unfailingly reveal it. {CT 251.3}

The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. It comes through the gentleness of the inspiration of His word, through the inward working of His Spirit, the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. The greatest manifestation of its power is seen in human nature brought to the perfection of the character of Christ. {7T 143.2}

The faith that works by love and purifies the soul produces the fruit of humility, patience, forbearance, long-suffering, peace, joy, and willing obedience. {HP 109.6}

True faith and true prayer—how strong they are! They are as two arms by which the human suppliant lays hold upon the power of Infinite Love. Faith is trusting in God,—believing that He loves us, and knows what is for our best good. Thus, instead of our own way, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership, and accepts its blessings. Truth, uprightness, purity, are pointed out as secrets of life’s success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these. Every good impulse or aspiration is the gift of God; faith receives from God the life that alone can produce true growth and efficiency. {GW 259.2}

Jesus does not call on us to follow Him, and then forsake us. If we surrender our lives to His service, we can never be placed in a position for which God has not made provision. Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend. If in our ignorance we make missteps, Christ does not leave us. His voice, clear and distinct, is heard, saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” [John 14:6.] “He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.” [Psalm 72:12.] {GW 263.1}

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.” [Isaiah 26:3.] The arm of Omnipotence is outstretched to lead us onward and still onward. Go forward, the Lord says; I will send you help. It is for My name’s glory that you ask; and you shall receive. Those who are watching for your failure shall yet see My word triumph gloriously. “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” [Matthew 21:22.] {GW 263.2}

It is contrition and faith and love that enable the soul to receive wisdom from heaven. Faith working by love is the key of knowledge, and everyone that loveth “knoweth God.” 1 John 4:7. {DA 139.3}

Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Psalm 16:8. {SC 69.1}

When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden. Its holy influence will be felt by all with whom we come in contact. The spirit of Christ in the heart is like a spring in the desert, flowing to refresh all and making those who are ready to perish, eager to drink of the water of life. {SC 77.3}

Love to Jesus will be manifested in a desire to work as He worked for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. It will lead to love, tenderness, and sympathy toward all the creatures of our heavenly Father's care. {SC 77.4}

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, we may go on from strength to strength, from victory to victory; for through Christ the grace of God has worked out our complete salvation. {1SM 364.1}

The only-begotten Son of God came to this world to redeem the fallen race. He has given us evidence of His great power. He will enable those who receive Him to build up characters free from all the tendencies that Satan reveals. We can resist the enemy and all his forces. The battle will be won, the victory gained, by him who chooses Christ as his leader, determined to do right because it is right. {HP 17.2}