

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

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

Lesson 12 “The Habits of a Steward”

Read for this week’s study

Ephesians 5:15–17; Colossians 3:23; Luke 12:35–48; James 4:14; Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27.

Memory Text

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:9–11, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Habit: Seek God First
- III. Habit: Look for the Return of Jesus
- IV. Habit: Use Time Wisely
- V. Habit: Keep a Healthy Mind, Body, and Soul
- VI. Habit: Self-discipline
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “The pathway that a habit creates is the fastest way that you can take to get the reward you seek. A habit is an ingrained decision. In other words, you don’t even have to think about it; you just do it. That habit can be very good or very bad, depending upon what it is you do. This week we look at powerful habits that will help a steward conduct God’s business.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. What role do habits play in religious life? How can they be a help or a hindrance to what God wants to accomplish?
3. What does it mean to seek God and his kingdom first?
4. Giving away all our money, preaching God’s truth in far-away lands, getting out of the rat race, redistribution of the world’s wealth or concern for ecology—none of these is the central goal of Christian living. Seeking God first is the goal of Christian living. When we do that, we realize that all we have is a gift, that God cares for us, and we are here to share God’s blessings with others. What are the practical implications of this for your life?

5. Classical Christianity during the Middle Ages lost the sight of the Second Coming. Why is looking for the return of Jesus so important? Since the 19th century, what kinds of excesses were brought in with Miller's and other apocalyptic movements?
6. What is the meaning of Christ's parable in Luke 12:35-48? Why is the sense of urgency so important for the disciples of Jesus? What happens when it is lost (Matthew 24:45-51)?
7. How can we use our time wisely? Why is balance such an important aspect of wisdom? Why does the wholistic approach offer an antidote that most religious approaches miss? What does it mean to be fully present? Why is worrying (being stuck either in the future or past) so lethal to the thriving that Jesus wants us to experience?
8. What is the role of self-discipline in the Christian life? Do all people have the same will? How do we deal with the reality that some people seem endowed with more self-discipline than others? In what ways can we work with God to create an inspiring, growing, everyday reality instead of experiencing guilty feelings about where we are in relation to others?
9. A popular approach in Adventism, perhaps from our Methodist roots, is that full surrender will deal with all the issues of struggling with sin. The New Testament presents a balanced understanding of the reality of God's Kingdom as the solution to the problem. Why? What aspects of God's kingdom are already here and which are not yet? Why does understanding the difference make such an impact on our Christian life?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

When David was depressed, he said so. Look for example in Psalm 77:7-10. I could have chosen many other passages, as you know:

Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?...And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed." (RSV)

He said that to God in prayer. Of course, that is only the first half of the psalm. Reading on and reading it all, you will find in the end of the seventy-seventh Psalm how David resolved his depression.

If David wanted vengeance, he wouldn't say, "Lord, thou knowest how I love Brother Isaac and I hope his crops will flourish this year," when he really wished that the blood of Brother Isaac would flow down the street and would water the furrows of his field and the locusts would consume his crops.

David would kneel and say, "Lord, thou knowest my thoughts anyway, so why should I pretend?" Look at Psalm 139:19, 21-24:

O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God, do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies [but without pausing, he goes right on]. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (RSV)

You see, he invited healing and he knew he needed a new heart and a right spirit; truth in the inner man. So he first would present himself honestly to God. He said, “You know all my thoughts anyway. So, why should I hide? You know how I feel. So search me and may my thoughts and the meditations and the words of my mouth be acceptable to you.”

If you should watch a loved one die, and you should cry, “Why God? Why?” Would God be offended? Or would the God you know reach down and put an arm around your shoulder and say, “I understand how you feel. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t feel that way. Someday I’ll make it plain to you. I wish I could right now. But please trust me, and trust me enough to be willing to wait.”

We have to know God well before those emergencies arise, so that we can trust him and pray to him like this. That’s why Paul said we need the Holy Spirit of truth to be able to trust and pray like this. In Romans 8:26, that familiar verse: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought.” (RSV)

And so, the Holy Spirit brings the truth to us—the truth about God. He helps us to see that truth and to be convinced about it, and the truth about ourselves and learn how to tell the truth to our gracious heavenly Father. And then God can do good things for us. Paul even said we should pray without ceasing. You note that last familiar verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Never stop praying.” (Norlie)

Or as Goodspeed translates it, “Never give up praying.” But if we should spend all our time on our knees, we would never get anything else done. So how can one pray without ceasing and still be effective in this life? But prayer, you see, in its very essence is thinking toward God. It means that God is at the very center of our thoughts. Eventually it becomes a habit that God should be at the very center of all our plans, always.

When we see him face-to-face, as we know we shall, will that be the end of prayer? Does that mean that prayer is yet another of the emergency measures God has used to keep open the channels of communication between himself and his children until the time comes when there will be no need to talk together anymore?

What do we mean when we sing, “Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer?” “Farewell, farewell, I will never talk to you, God, again.” No, if prayer is conversation with a friend, when we meet God, the hour of prayer will have barely just begun. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #15, “Talking to God as A Friend” recorded May,

1984, Loma Linda, California} To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/15MMCAG>

And the early Christians sorely needed the encouraging message of that sixty-sixth book, and the picture of the angels celebrating, because there was a serious crisis among God's people on this planet at that time.

For one thing, the Second Coming seemed to be indefinitely delayed. They thought he would come around 50 A.D., and Paul had to tell them, "No, not yet", in his letter to Thessalonica. There were still more things to happen. By the 90's—what had gone wrong that Jesus had not yet returned? And besides this, there were heresies in the church. Some were even teaching that Christ had not really come in human form. He had not really suffered and really died. He had faked it all. They're called the *Docetists*, who taught he just pretended to do it. And then there was great opposition, and serious persecution. The apostles were all dead, save one. And he was the elderly John, now a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. What good news was there, to encourage the early Christians?

And you could count on God when things were that bleak, to send a message of encouragement and enlightenment and explanation to his people. He surely wouldn't send a book of mysteries and dates and schedules of events that they could not possibly understand. Rather, that sixty-sixth book that he did send, the book of Revelation (which means clarification, not mystification), is an invitation to discouraged early Christians to look a little higher—to take the larger view of things. To see how they've all been caught up in a vast great controversy that affects the whole universe! And that it's a controversy over God's own character and government. And then to read on and see that God has already won this war and the angels all agree with him. To see that this is the good news. And then to read on and realize that God is inviting us to join in the celebration; and then to go out to the world and invite all others who are willing to listen, to join in God's victory in the war. And then we Christians might not seem so much on the defensive all the time; we have good news to tell. There's no way God and his side can lose. And should we not *join the winning side*? is the invitation in that sixty-sixth book.

And the book also says that you can count on God to wait until this truth about him—this good news about his character and government—has been spread all over the world. Because God is the kind of person who will wait until his children have had an opportunity to understand the issues in the war; and to be ready for the awesome events the Bible describes as taking place before Jesus' return. To see and to present the plan of salvation in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God is, I believe, the highest privilege of God's friends on this planet today. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series,

Conversations About God, #1, “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>*

Do you think the end will come, the conflict will be over, Christ will return—in our own lifetime? The disciples wondered about this, you remember, and they asked Jesus, as in the first of the texts on our Bible Reference Sheet, Matthew 24:3: “Tell us [they said], when will this be and how can we tell when you’re coming back and the world will come to an end?” (Beck)

And Jesus replied that even the angels do not know. In fact, he added, that while he was still in his humble, human form on this planet, that even he did not know himself, only the Father. Look again at Matthew 24:36, next on the sheet. Jesus’ own words: “But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father.” (NEB)

But Jesus went on to indicate that there was something much more important than knowing the exact time. He indicated that it was far more important to trust him enough to be willing to wait. You recall our conversation, “All God Asks of Us Is Trust?” For if only we trust him enough to be ready for his coming, whenever that should be, we really don’t need to know the exact time. If we trust him, all will be well. Jesus indicated this in the next verse, in John 14:1, 3: “Set your troubled hearts at rest [on the subject, he said]. Trust in God always; trust also in me . . . I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.” (NEB)

But he did give them some details by which they could tell the approximate time. As they sat together one day on the Mount of Olives, Jesus spoke of many signs by which the disciples could tell when the end was getting nearer. Very familiar passages to all those who believe in the advent; he spoke of alarming disturbances in earth and sky. He spoke of growing distrust between the nations. He spoke of the rise of false religious leaders; a subject we have discussed before. He particularly warned of those who would arise and teach that his second coming was to be in secret. “Don’t believe that,” Jesus said. As in the next passage, Matthew 24:26, 27, 30, and 31:

Don’t believe it. [That is, don’t believe that I will be coming in secret.] For the Son of Man will come like the lightning that flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west. . . .

And all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other. (GNB)

Now that is hardly the description of an invisible event. Quite on the contrary, John affirmed very clearly in the last book in the Bible, that every eye will see him come. And you remember that passage in Revelation 1:7: “Every eye will see him.” (RSV) {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #19, “How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?” 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/19MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

When a soul receives Christ, he receives power to live the life of Christ. {SD 12.5}

He whose mind loves to dwell upon God has a strong defense. He will be quick to perceive the dangers that threaten his spiritual life, and a sense of danger will lead him to call upon God for help and protection. {TMK 240.4}

When Jesus speaks of the new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being. To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections from the world, and fasten them upon Christ. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart?—A changed life. {MYP 72.1}

Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine. {COL 312.2}

The value of man is estimated in heaven according to the capacity of the heart to know God. This knowledge is the spring from which flows all power. God created man that every faculty might be the faculty of the divine mind; and He is ever seeking to bring the human mind into association with the divine. He offers us the privilege of co-operation with Christ in revealing His grace to the world, that we may receive increased knowledge of heavenly things. {COL 354.3}

But God is ever seeking to impress our hearts by His Holy Spirit, that we shall be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. We may place our will on the side of God’s will, and in His strength and grace resist the temptations of the enemy. As we yield to the influence of the Spirit of God, our conscience becomes tender and sensitive, and sin that we have passed by with little thought, becomes exceeding sinful. {OHC 153.4}

To human beings striving for conformity to the divine image there is imparted an outlay of heaven’s treasure, an excellency of power, that will place them higher than even the angels who have never fallen. {COL 162.4}

The Spirit of Christ, working upon the heart conforms it to His image; for Christ is the model upon which the Spirit works. By the ministry of His Word, by His providences, by His inward working, God stamps the likeness of Christ upon the soul. {TDG 46.5}

Through the gospel, souls that are degraded and enslaved by Satan are to be redeemed to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. God's purpose is not merely to deliver from the suffering that is the inevitable result of sin, but to save from sin itself. The soul, corrupted and deformed, is to be purified, transformed, that it may be clothed in "the beauty of the Lord our God," "conformed to the image of His Son." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Psalm 90:17; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 2:9. Eternity alone can reveal the glorious destiny to which man, restored to God's image, may attain. {MB 60.3}

The coin, though lying among dust and rubbish, is a piece of silver still. Its owner seeks it because it is of value. So every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God's sight accounted precious. As the coin bears the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God; and though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness. {COL 194.3}

The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. It is the knowledge that works transformation of character. This knowledge, received, will recreate the soul in the image of God. It will impart to the whole being a spiritual power that is divine. {MH 425.2}

"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." 2 Corinthians 3:18. {MH 425.3}

To the heart that has become purified, all is changed. Transformation of character is the testimony to the world of an indwelling Christ. The Spirit of God produces a new life in the soul, bringing the thoughts and desires into obedience to the will of Christ; and the inward man is renewed in the image of God. Weak and erring men and women show to the world that the redeeming power of grace can cause the faulty character to develop into symmetry and abundant fruitfulness. {PK 233.2}

The heart that receives the word of God is not as a pool that evaporates, not like a broken cistern that loses its treasure. It is like the mountain stream, fed by unfailing springs, whose cool, sparkling waters leap from rock to rock, refreshing the weary, the thirsty, the heavy-laden. It is like a river constantly flowing and, as it advances, becoming deeper and wider, until its life-giving waters are spread over all the earth. {PK 233.3}

So it is with the true child of God. The religion of Christ reveals itself as a vitalizing, pervading principle, a living, working, spiritual energy. When the heart is opened to the heavenly influence of truth and love, these principles will flow forth again like streams in the desert, causing fruitfulness to appear where now are barrenness and dearth. {PK 234.1}