

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2023: *Managing for the Master—Till He Comes*

Lesson 9 “Beware of Covetousness”

Read for this week’s study

Isaiah 14:12–14; Ephesians 5:5; Joshua 7; John 12:1–8; Acts 5:1–11; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Memory Text

“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses’ ” (Luke 12:15, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Ultimate Original Sin?
- III. An Accursed Thing in the Camp
- IV. The Heart of Judas
- V. Ananias and Sapphira
- VI. Overcoming Covetousness
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “Covetousness is right up there with extortion, idolatry, fornication, and adultery. That’s what the text in 1 Cor. 6:9, 10 says, and this week we will look at examples of just how bad it is and what we can do to overcome it.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. “Covetousness has been defined as an inordinate desire for wealth or possessions that really don’t belong to you.” The tenth commandment refers to a desire for what is not properly our own, the stuff the neighbor has (spouse, house, or anything else). Our current consumer society is to a great extent propelled by this desire, that is perhaps inherent in some form to all of us humans. This skewed desire is also artificially manufactured, to a great extent, by the constant bombardment with images of lifestyles of those who have more than we do.
3. What role did covetousness play in the fall of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12–14) and Eve (Genesis 3:6)? (Sunday’s lesson) Is this the ultimate original sin and why? The most obvious way in which Israel was distinct in the ancient Mediterranean world was

- their practice of putting voluntary limits on their wealth. They were encouraged to live in deliberate generosity.
4. The prohibition of the tenth commandment is a combination of *wanting (desiring)* and *seizing (acquiring)* which produces an addictive system of money and possession, leading to skewed social relationships where no one is safe from predatory eagerness. The commandment uses the term “neighbor” three times providing a check on addictive acquisitiveness. Concern for the well-being of the neighbor is pervasive because the neighbor is an undeniable social fact that will not go away.
 5. Monday’s lesson focuses on Achan’s coveting “devoted things” thus “breaking faith” (Joshua 7). What is the connection with the cessation of the manna once the Israelites entered the Promised Land (5:12)? No motivation is given for this act of Achan, it is only described with a quick succession of four verbs: “I sinned, I saw, I covered, I took.” (7:20-21) The objects are a mantle, silver, and gold. The consequences of Achan’s action are not only a disaster for him, his family and his tribe, but also for the people of Israel as a whole. As a result, Achan loses all he had (7:24). His coveting is in a context where he already had great wealth. Having many possessions does not curb a compelling desire for more. The valley is named Valley of Trouble, but see Hosea 2:15, where God redesignates it as a “door of hope”.
 6. Tuesday’s lesson brings us to the teaching of Jesus (see also the memory text!) and the action of Judas, the NT counterpart of Achan and the direct opposite of Jesus, who brought life in abundance (John 10:10; 12:1-8). Judas claims to be mindful of the poor, so the extravagance of the oil for anointing Jesus evokes opposition from Judas. He operates in terms of a zero-sum notion about money: money used for this will not be available for that – used for precious oil it will not be available for the poor. However, Jesus operates from a principle of *abundance*, assuring the disciples that “your heavenly Father” gives all that is needed. The *stinginess* of Judas and the *abundance* of Jesus are an epitome of the larger struggle between darkness and light, between evil and good. Jesus is an agent of boundless abundance, and His disciples, then and now, are invited to participate in what God is doing in the larger domain of society.
 7. Wednesday’s lesson takes us into the book of Acts, where we witness the clash between the *imperial authority* and the *work of the Holy Spirit*. The early church is presented as a community of solidarity without needing or being able to be precise about economic matters, and with a multiplicity of models and mandates. When Jesus rose from the dead, a community of irrational joy and irrepressible generosity was created. The privilege of stewardship took precedence over the right of ownership. Therefore, the strong were helping the weak. What is the significance of the story of Ananias and Sapphira in this context (Acts 5:1-11)? How is it contrasted with the story of Achan (Joshua 7:1 LXX) and Barnabas (Acts 4:37)?
 8. How is covetousness overcome? (Thursday’s lesson) Was the “great fear” (Acts 5:11) among the members of the community rooted in the awareness that the same

dangerous temptation can operate in all of our lives? Why does it seem to be so much easier for us to follow in the wake of Ananias and Sapphira rather than the example of Barnabas? Where are we tempted to seek recognition greater than our honesty?

9. The Jews of Jesus' day put 23.33% of their income into the right 'storehouse', yet, Jesus showed that their show of spirituality did not bring them closer to God or make their religion attractive to outsiders (Matthew 23:15.23). How can a clearer understanding of Sabbath be an antidote to coveting?
10. Research shows that a tendency for upward financial comparisons generates increasing amounts of greed and decreasing amounts of compassion. The ancient financial practices in Israel discouraged upward financial comparisons. How can God's church be one of God's answers to the community-shattering forces at work in the world today and become a positive force for neighborly good?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

No, you see the law, by itself, just tells you what to do, and you remember in Romans 7 on the struggle, Paul says, "When I read the ten more and more carefully, and I came to that tenth one, and it said I not only should not sin, I should not even want to," he said, "that made me angry. I'd been good all these years, and a man of strong feeling. I had often wanted to do what was wrong, and I measured my virtue by the fact that though I wanted to do what was wrong so much, I didn't do it." Now there's a real saint! And Paul says, "I realize now that full salvation means that eventually I will even lose the desire to do what is wrong." That's real healing, you see. I'm not earning brownie points by being good. I want to be healed; that's all. What must I do to be saved? In Acts, "Trust God." And God says, "I will not just admit you to the kingdom, but I *will* heal and restore you, all the damage done."

And you remember the argument in that chapter where Paul finally realizes the law did him a service in revealing that inside himself, though he appeared to be good, that evil was still in there. He says, "I still want to do that thing. I've disciplined myself, and I haven't done it. I would really like to be delivered from this doomed body. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The good news has power to save and to heal."

And in heaven, is it not right, we will live with neighbors who not only do not hurt, they don't even want to. You don't have to lock your house because everybody will obey the law in those days. Is it because they wouldn't dare disobey in heaven? No, there won't even need to be a law anymore. Nobody even wants to steal. The law is written in the heart. That's the whole meaning of the law being written in the heart, instead of on the wall. We've come to the place where the tenth commandment has been obeyed. We do not even want to do what is wrong. And God offers that healing. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of

God in all 66 – Romans, recorded May 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/61MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/62MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

But we have the same problem in English. The meaning of a word depends on the setting. How about “coveting” in our book for tonight? Is it all right to covet? “Thou shalt not covet.” But 1 Corinthians 12 says, “Covet earnestly the best gifts.”

Sometimes in fun at Christmas time when we were all home and my parents were both still alive there would be the gifts around the breakfast table on Christmas morning, and since so many of us had studied for the ministry, it might slip out, you know, the verse that says, “Covet earnestly the best gifts,” but we knew better than that. In the proper setting of 1 Corinthians 12, it’s of all the gifts of the Spirit, they’re all good ones, desire the best one of all, which is love. But the same word “covet” is the word in the tenth commandment “Thou shalt not covet.” When the context so indicates, coveting is bad. When the context so indicates, coveting is good. It means to desire something very much. Now if you desire something bad, that’s bad. If you desire something good, that’s good. That’s the difference. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Exodus, 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/3MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Then Paul goes on, “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? Because when I just deal with the law impersonally, it seems to even provoke and arouse me, by no means. Yet if it had not been for the law I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” It’s interesting that Paul picks out the tenth commandment, which might seem to be the most general one. In the Greek it simply prohibits any evil desire. But it was the tenth one that provoked him the most because the tenth doesn’t prohibit any particular act that could be avoided. The tenth commandment prohibits even evil desire, and thus puts its finger on the very essence of sin.

You remember 1 John 3:4. You see, sin is not so much *the* transgression of *the* law. The Greek word for sin is lawlessness, rebelliousness, it is an attitude. And the commandment that touches on that innermost attitude is the tenth, “Thou shalt not have evil desire.” But Jesus applied the tenth, didn’t he, to some of the others. He said, “Maybe you never murder, but if you hate your brother you’re a murderer, if you want to kill him.” A man may have never seemed to commit adultery, but he says, “If you desire to, if you lust, you have broken that commandment.” For Jesus very well understood the tenth.

The tenth is the most personal of all of them, and the one that provoked Paul the most. For he'd been a very exemplary Pharisee, and he'd gone for days without violating the Commandments, it would appear. But then he read that tenth again, that he couldn't even desire to sin. And he says, "That provoked me, that irritated me." Later on he says, "I delight in that tenth one" because you know what that tenth one means? That in the New Earth, to which no one will be admitted whose life cannot be described by the Ten Commandments, or Jesus' summary that love is the fulfilling of the law. We'll not only live in a society where people don't murder and don't steal, they won't even want to, they won't even desire to. For the tenth commandment will also describe the way they think and feel and treat other people. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 7, recorded November 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/13MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/14MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

Satan is a deceiver. When he sinned in heaven, even the loyal angels did not fully discern his character. This was why God did not at once destroy Satan. Had He done so, the holy angels would not have perceived the justice and love of God. A doubt of God's goodness would have been as evil seed that would yield the bitter fruit of sin and woe. Therefore the author of evil was spared, fully to develop his character. Through long ages God has borne the anguish of beholding the work of evil, He has given the infinite Gift of Calvary, rather than leave any to be deceived by the misrepresentations of the wicked one; for the tares could not be plucked up without danger of uprooting the precious grain. And shall we not be as forbearing toward our fellow men as the Lord of heaven and earth is toward Satan? {COL 72.2}

God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, nor even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission. Such efforts as only infinite love and wisdom could devise were made to convince him of his error. The spirit of discontent had never before been known in heaven. Lucifer himself did not at first see whither he was drifting; he did not understand the real nature of his feelings. But as his dissatisfaction was proved to be without cause, Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong, that the divine claims were just, and that he ought to acknowledge them as such before all heaven. Had he done this, he might have saved himself and many angels. He had not at this time fully cast off his allegiance to God. Though he had forsaken his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office. But pride

forbade him to submit. He persistently defended his own course, maintained that he had no need of repentance, and fully committed himself, in the great controversy, against his Maker. {GC 495.3}

In His dealing with sin, God could employ only righteousness and truth. Satan could use what God could not—flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government before the angels, claiming that God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. Therefore it must be demonstrated before the inhabitants of heaven, as well as of all the worlds, that God's government was just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper, and his real object, must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works. {GC 498.1}

Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects upon both men and angels, would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority. It would testify that with the existence of God's government and His law is bound up the well-being of all the creatures He has made. Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin and suffering its punishments. {GC 499.1}

This condition of things had existed a long period of time before Satan was unmasked and the evil ones expelled (Letter 162, 1906). {4BC 1143.3}

God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. Lucifer, as the anointed cherub, had been highly exalted; he was greatly loved by the heavenly beings, and his influence over them was strong. God's government included not only the inhabitants of heaven, but of all the worlds that He had created; and Lucifer had concluded that if he could carry the angels of heaven with him in rebellion, he could carry also all the worlds. He had artfully presented his side of the question, employing sophistry and fraud to secure his objects. His power to deceive was very great. By disguising himself in a cloak of falsehood, he had gained an advantage. All his acts were so clothed with mystery that it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work. Until fully developed, it could not be made to appear the evil thing it was; his disaffection would not be seen to be rebellion. Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character or see to what his work was leading. {PP 41.2}

God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of love. He would have them obey Him because they have an intelligent appreciation of His wisdom, justice, and benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love Him because they are drawn toward Him in admiration of His attributes. {GC 541.3}

Seeing the danger of Judas, He had brought him close to Himself, within the inner circle of His chosen and trusted disciples. Day after day, when the burden lay heaviest upon His own heart, He had borne the pain of continual contact with that stubborn, suspicious, brooding spirit; He had witnessed and labored to counteract among His disciples that continuous, secret, and subtle antagonism. And all this that no possible saving influence might be lacking to that imperiled soul! {Ed 92.4}

Christ knew the heart of Judas, yet He washed his feet. Infinite love could do no more to bring Judas to repentance, and save him from taking this fatal step. If this service of his Master, in humbling Himself to wash the feet of the worst sinner, did not break his heart, what more could be done? It was the last act of love that Jesus could evidence in behalf of Judas. Infinite love could not compel Judas to repent, confess his sin, and be saved. Every opportunity was granted him. Nothing was left undone that could be done to save him from the snare of Satan (RH June 14, 1898). {5BC 1138.7}

Truthfulness and integrity are attributes of God, and he who possesses these qualities possesses a power that is invincible. {HP 179.6}

If in our ignorance we make missteps, the Saviour does not forsake us. We need never feel that we are alone. Angels are our companions. The Comforter that Christ promised to send in His name abides with us. In the way that leads to the City of God there are no difficulties which those who trust in Him may not overcome. There are no dangers which they may not escape. There is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy. {MH 249.1}

There is no power in the whole satanic force that can disable the soul that trusts, in simple confidence, in the wisdom that comes from God. {ML 316.3}

Christ is our tower of strength, and Satan can have no power over the soul that walks with God in humility of mind. The promise, "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." In Christ there is perfect and complete help for every tempted soul. . . . If we will look to Jesus as the One in whom we may trust, He will never fail us in any emergency. {ML 316.4}