

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2025: *God's Love and Justice*
Lesson 5 "The Wrath of Divine Love"

Read for this week's study

Psalm 78; Jonah 4:1–4; Matthew 10:8; Matthew 21:12, 13; Jeremiah 51:24, 25; Romans 12:17–21.

Memory Text

"But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath" (Psalm 78:38, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Grieved by Evil
- III. God Is Slow to Anger
- IV. Righteous Indignation
- V. God Does Not Afflict Willingly
- VI. Show Compassion
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. Though God's compassion is often celebrated, many find the idea of His wrath disturbing. If God is love, they argue, He should never exhibit or express wrath. What do you think? Should God express wrath or not? Be prepared to defend your answer. (Sabbath Afternoon's Lesson)
2. The author of the lesson states: "God's wrath is simply the appropriate response of love to evil and injustice. Accordingly, evil provokes God to passion in favor of the victims of evil and against its perpetrators. Divine wrath, then, is another expression of divine love." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? (Sabbath Afternoon's Lesson)
3. Today's lesson states: "The God of the Bible loves justice and hates evil." Do you consider it appropriate to say that God hates anything? If so, why does God hate evil

- so much? Read Nehemiah 9:7-33. How does this relate to the cycle of rebellion mentioned above? (Sunday's Lesson)
4. Read Exodus 34:6-7, the clearest summary of God's character in the Old Testament. How do you understand this passage? Read Jonah 4:1-4. What does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about Jonah? How can one show mercy and grace without giving license to sin or enabling abuse and oppression? (Monday's Lesson)
 5. While there are many inappropriate forms of anger, the Bible teaches that there is such a thing as "righteous indignation", the proper response of love to abuse or oppression. It has a protective function in a sinful world. Read Matthew 21:12-16. What was the evil that Jesus was responding to in the temple? Why does Jesus use a whip to enforce these changes? (Tuesday's Lesson)
 6. How can you tell the difference between righteous indignation and selfish anger? Why is it easier to see the selfishness in another's anger rather than our own? (Tuesday's Lesson)
 7. The author of the lesson states: "Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly displays His passion in favor of the downtrodden and the oppressed and His corresponding righteous indignation against the victimizers and oppressors. If there were no evil, God would not be angry." Do you agree? Read Lamentations 3:32-33. What does this text tell us about God? What do Ezra 5:12 and 2 Chronicles 36:16 tell us about God's role in the Babylonian Exile? According to Jeremiah 51:24-25, how did God feel about that? How do you show God's compassion for the bully while still protecting the victims of wrongdoing? (Wednesday's Lesson)
 8. The lesson comments: "Love is essential to God; wrath is not. Where there is no evil or injustice, there is no wrath. . . . Eradicating evil from the universe also will effectively eliminate anger and wrath." Do you find this statement helpful? Why or why not? (Thursday's Lesson)
 9. It is generally understood that punishing children to correct defiance or rebellion is appropriate, but punishing them for blunders or immaturity is not. If a parent instructs the child, "Clean your room!" and returns fifteen minutes later to see that nothing was done, is that an example of defiance or childishness? (Thursday's Lesson)
 10. Some worry that the existence of divine anger might unintentionally be taken to give license to human vengeance. How do texts like Deuteronomy 32:35, Proverbs 20:22 and 24:29, Romans 12:17-21, and Hebrews 10:30 apply to this issue? Do you think people will still get offended with each other in eternity and need intervention to maintain relationships? (Thursday's Lesson)
 11. What problems always arise when people seek vengeance that never arise when God seeks it? (Friday's Lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: Graham, I want you to comment on this question of God's wrath. I can hear somebody saying this evening, and perhaps this question has come up before: "But doesn't the Bible talk about God's wrath, many, many times? God's anger?" Can you give me about a forty-five second response on that?

Graham: On God's wrath. Yes. When we talk about why Jesus had to die, we can do more with this. But I wouldn't want to live one night without having the question pretty well resolved. If you take all sixty-six books, and look at the references to God's wrath all the way through, you'll find so many places that will say (and later I'll put the text down on the sheet for the evening) God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choice. It is not like our anger. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #2 with Lou Venden, "What Went Wrong in God's Universe" 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/2MMCAG>*

So in imagination let's go to the cross and watch Jesus die. Did He really die? The soldiers were surprised to find he was already dead. Crucifixion was a slow way of dying. Evidently something else had happened. Is it true that Jesus was dying the death of a sinner, to show us how the sinner really dies? Look at the next verse on our sheet, 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin." (RSV) He did die the death of a sinner. And what caused Jesus to die? As you watch Him dying on the cross, is God killing His Son? Is He torturing His Son to death? Is God pouring out His wrath on His Son; something the Bible so often pictures God doing toward sinners for whom there is no further hope?

Well, it all depends on the meaning of wrath. What is God's wrath? One of the clearest explanations in the whole Bible is in Romans 1, the next passage. And I wish we could read at least the whole first chapter. But look at these few verses; Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth [and it is the truth about God in that whole section]. . . . Therefore, God gave them up. . . . For this reason God gave them up. . . . And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up. . . . (RSV)

Three times it states in Romans 1 that God's wrath is simply His turning away, in loving disappointment, from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequence of their own rebellious choice. Was Jesus given up? Look at Romans 4:25: ". . . Jesus our Lord, who was **put to death** [given up—emphasis supplied] for our trespasses." (RSV)

There is nothing in the Greek that says He was put to death. It says what is in the brackets there. "Jesus our Lord, who was given up for our trespasses."

And it is exactly the same word as in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28. And versions ought to leave them the same to show the point that Jesus died under the wrath of His Father. But look at the real meaning of God's wrath. And this was not new with Paul. It's all through the Old Testament, most dramatically in Hosea 11. Again, I wish we could read the whole chapter. Hosea 11 just verses 7 and 8: "My people are bent on turning away from me. . . . How, oh how can I give you up, Ephraim! How, oh how, can I hand you over Israel!" (*Phillips*)

Did Jesus understand that this is the experience He was passing through? Did Jesus know He was being given up as Hosea describes it? And Paul later in Romans 1 and 4? What did Jesus cry just before He died? "My God, my God, why are You beating Me up? Why are you torturing Me? Why are you killing Me?" No! "Why have you given Me up?" He knew.

We should have come earlier though to Gethsemane. For He began this awesome experience of demonstrating the truth about God's gracious but awful warning, that the wages of sin is death. We should have come to Gethsemane. And there Jesus fell to the ground dying. The angels were watching. Was God killing His Son in the Garden of Gethsemane, or did Jesus feel His unity with His Father breaking up? He began to feel the awesome loneliness of being given up. Had Jesus been left in the Garden of Gethsemane, and had He died there, could you say that the Father had killed the Son? Now had He been a mere creature you wouldn't know; but the angels knew who Jesus was. They knew that He was God. And they knew the meaning of His words. I should have included the verse in John 10:18. Jesus said, "No one takes My life from Me. No one can. I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up." The angels knew that was the truth. And if Jesus died it was not because His Father had killed Him. The Father was giving Him up and both of them suffered and the Father was crying, "How can I give you up?" The Son who had assumed humanity was the One who died. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #8, "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>*

Lou: This individual last week wanted to ask this question: "Could the word 'wrath' have been translated differently, as in the three angels' messages? Could there have been a better word than 'wrath' used?"

Graham: Hmm. That's an interesting question. That's a limitation of human language. The word is *orge* which just **did** mean wrath, even fury. God is limited to our human language with all the hazards thereunto appertaining. And so we have to take the whole context to understand. The question there that appeals to me most is: "Why would God use the word at all, if He does not

wish to be understood as angry?” It would seem to me that He has left the impression that He is angry with us, and I would have to compare that with a father’s conversation with his little girl, say.

You’ve tried everything else under the sun to persuade her not to help herself to cookies at three in the afternoon, and it hasn’t worked. But finally you put this little youngster in front of you, and you know how it is with the little daughters; we both have them, and how cute and innocent they can look, even in the midst of iniquity. That’s true! And you say, “Look, if you do that one more time, Daddy’s going to be **very, very** cross with you.” Now, don’t smile when you say that, because she doesn’t know what “cross” means. She can’t look it up in *Webster’s*. She knows what “cross” means by the look on your face and the tone of your voice. So you feel like a bully. Here’s this little, tiny child with pigtails, and you’re saying, “Daddy will be very, very cross with you.”

And a little later, you thought you had impressed her adequately; you find her tiptoeing around the corner and reaching up and taking another cookie. And it’s so cute, you wish you had your camera. And then you suddenly realize, no, this is the time for some stern discipline. And you put this helpless little girl in front of you. She puts her hands behind her and assumes that little posture that little girls can, and you as a big brute say, “Daddy told you that if you did that one more time, he’d be very, very cross.” You have to look cross, sound cross. Don’t glance over to your wife, you know, or you’ll melt. You’ve got to go through with this thing.

I think it’s a matter of communication. And God has dealt with children. We’ve been the immature children. He even has to say, “Do that one more time and I will be furious with you! And I wish I didn’t have to say that one more time.” So I think our human experience helps us to understand the Scripture. Parents and teachers and little ones are in the best position to read the Bible sympathetically, it seems to me. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #9 with Lou Venden, “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>*

Now, immediately Paul begins to discuss God’s wrath, which may seem a surprise right here. He’s been talking about the good news, without interruption up to this point. Why do you think he switches to talk about God’s wrath? “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and wickedness of men, who by their wickedness suppress the truth.” Has he changed the subject, do you think? Has he changed from discussing the good news, the truth about God’s righteousness, that he is infinitely trustworthy, and this good news can lead us back to trust, and salvation, and healing. Has he changed the subject, when he begins to talk about God’s wrath?

Now this is much discussed, and Ellen White warns that a misunderstanding of God's wrath has turned many people against God. Many people hate God because they misunderstand his wrath. My personal conviction is that he hasn't changed the subject at all. One of the things that has raised the most serious questions about God's righteousness, is his attitude toward rebels, and toward sinners. The Bible describes this sometimes, as wrath. And the Devil has seized on this and tried to picture God as a fierce, arbitrary, unforgiving and severe God, who delights in punishing and tormenting and finally destroying his creatures. Why would I ever want him to come back the second time? How could I ever be comfortable with that kind of God for eternity? This is hardly good news. To me that is the Devil's picture of God.

But how would God like us to understand his wrath? I believe that it was essential right now for Paul, who's saying, "The good news is that God is infinitely righteous. He's not as he's been misrepresented by his enemies. For Paul to deal with the greatest problem of all, what has been God's attitude toward and treatment of those who have rebelled against him and distrusted him, and rejected the good news and the truth?"

Well, he goes on to explain. What do you think of his explanation? Is it good news or bad news? "For the wrath of God is revealed [in some way] from heaven against [notice] ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth." Now he doesn't mention any specific indulgence here, as so serious an offence that God reveals his wrath on such people. He speaks of their suppressing the truth.

Would you agree, that the most destructive thing a person could do in this universe, is to twist, and pervert, and suppress the good news, the truth about God? What was Satan's ultimately destructive sin, up in heaven? Was he caught attending some show he shouldn't have gone to? Was he drinking and smoking? Was he swearing? What was he doing? Was he committing adultery? What was this awful thing he did up in heaven that split the universe? Wasn't he just twisting the truth, and twisting it so little and so carefully, it appeared that even the loyal angels did not understand what he was doing. They stayed with God out of sheer loyalty, not because they understood his misrepresentations. Not until Calvary, were Satan's purposes finally unmasked. That's how carefully and subtly, he had twisted and perverted the truth. What truth? Was he leading the angels to worship on a different Sabbath? Was he leading them to eat things they shouldn't, to give up tithing? What was he leading them to do? The only change, as I understand it through the sixty-six books, Satan was seeking to change their understanding of the kind of person God was, and therefore what he wanted of his people. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 1, recorded September 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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

Further Study with Ellen White

God calls upon His creatures to turn their attention from the confusion and perplexity around them and admire His handiwork. As we study His works, angels from heaven will be by our side to enlighten our minds and guard them from Satan's deceptions. {CT 457.1}

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}

None need abandon themselves to discouragement and despair. Satan may come to you with the cruel suggestion, "Yours is a hopeless case. You are irredeemable." But there is hope for you in Christ. God does not bid us overcome in our own strength. He asks us to come close to His side. Whatever difficulties we labor under, which weigh down soul and body, He waits to make us free. {MH 249.2}

In every human being He discerned infinite possibilities. He saw men as they might be, transfigured by His grace—in "the beauty of the Lord our God." Psalm 90:17. Looking upon them with hope, He inspired hope. Meeting them with confidence, He inspired trust. Revealing in Himself man's true ideal, He awakened, for its attainment, both desire and faith. In His presence souls despised and fallen realized that they still were men, and they longed to prove themselves worthy of His regard. In many a heart that seemed dead to all things holy, were awakened new impulses. To many a despairing one there opened the possibility of a new life. {Ed 80.1}

Christ bound them to His heart by the ties of love and devotion; and by the same ties He bound them to their fellow men. With Him love was life, and life was service. "Freely ye have received," He said, "freely give." Matthew 10:8. {Ed 80.2}

After a season the priests and rulers ventured back to the temple. When the panic had abated, they were seized with anxiety to know what would be the next movement of Jesus. They expected Him to take the throne of David. Quietly returning to the temple, they heard the voices of men, women, and children praising God. Upon entering, they stood transfixed before the wonderful scene. They saw the sick healed, the blind restored to sight, and deaf receive their hearing, and the crippled leap for joy. The children were foremost in the rejoicing. Jesus had healed their maladies; He had clasped them in His arms, received their kisses of grateful affection, and some of them had fallen asleep upon His breast as He was teaching the people. Now with glad voices the children sounded His praise. They repeated the hosannas of the day before, and waved palm branches triumphantly before the Saviour. The temple echoed and re-

echoed with their acclamations, “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!” “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation!” Psalm 118:26; Zechariah 9:9. “Hosanna to the Son of David!” {DA 592.2}

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}

Even when he was cast out of heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since only the service of love can be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of the worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question. {PP 42.3}

Satan’s rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages—a perpetual testimony to the nature of sin and its terrible results. 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 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 beings, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin, and suffering its penalty. {PP 42.4}

Kind words simply spoken, little attentions simply bestowed, will sweep away the clouds of temptation which gather over the soul. The true expression of heaven-born sympathy has power to open the door of hearts that need the fragrance of Christlike words, and the simple, delicate touch of the spirit of Christ’s love. {MH 354.4}

Tender, compassionate, sympathetic, ever considerate of others, He represented the character of God, and was constantly engaged in service for God and man. {8T 286.4}

The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health. It is the Heaven-

ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us but in our hearts and characters (Letter 406, 1906). {6BC 1074.2}

God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to manifest, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God. {MH 419.4}

With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. He had declared that the principles of God's government make forgiveness impossible. Had the world been destroyed, he would have claimed that his accusations were proved true. He was ready to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above. But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. Though corruption and defiance might be seen in every part of the alien province, a way for its recovery was provided. At the very crisis, when Satan seemed about to triumph, the Son of God came with the embassy of divine grace. Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race. Notwithstanding the perversity of men, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled. {DA 37.2}

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, a God of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. By the world's Redeemer the thick darkness with which Satan had enshrouded the throne of the Deity was swept away, and the Father was again manifest to men as the Light of life. {RH, February 15, 1912 par. 4}

Up to the time of Christ's first advent, men worshiped cruel, despotic gods. Even the Jewish mind was reached through fear, and not love. Christ's mission on the earth was to reveal to men that God was not a despot, but a heavenly Father, full of love and mercy for His children. {18MR 112.4}

Recommended Reading: "God's Justice and Love" – *The Signs of the Times*, August 27, 1902
<https://egwwritings.org>