

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2025: *God's Love and Justice*
Lesson 12 "*Love and Justice: The Two Greatest Commandments*"

Read for this week's study

Matthew 22:34–40; Zechariah 7:9–12; Psalm 82; Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23–30; Luke 10:25–37.

Memory Text

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Two Greatest Commandments
- III. The Two Greatest Sins
- IV. God Loves Justice
- V. Called to Establish Justice
- VI. Who Is My Neighbor?
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. "When others are afflicted by poverty, oppression, or any kind of injustice, we should be concerned. When others are oppressed, we should not turn a blind eye. Instead, we should ask ourselves what we can do, individually and corporately, to advance God's love and justice in a way that reflects to our broken world our Lord's perfect character of righteousness and love." (Sabbath Afternoon)
2. How is Jesus' answer in Matthew 22:34-40, that his opponents cannot question, connected with what happens in the last scenes of Jesus' life? (Sunday's lesson) Why does Jesus follow it up with a question his opponents cannot answer? It is only when we connect the two commandments with Jesus dying for the sins of the world and rising again, that we see them not as orders to be obeyed (in our own strength), but as invitations and promises to a new way of life in which step by step, hatred and pride are left behind and love becomes a reality.
3. How is the sin of idolatry an opposite from love for God (Psalm 135:13-19)? (Monday's lesson) How is that connected with the mistreatment of people, especially those less fortunate (Zechariah 7:9-12 cf. Exodus 22:22-27)? What was the purpose of this

post-Exodus legislation (Exodus 22:27)? How would you explain why the love for God cannot be separated from the love for others?

4. How does Psalm 82 express God's concern for justice in this world? How would that apply to where you live today? (Tuesday's lesson) Jesus is very clear, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Yet in Adventism the orthodoxy of our Fundamental Beliefs is often valued more than showing love to others! Why might that be?
5. Why are justice, mercy and faithfulness the more important matters of the law according to Jesus in Matthew 23:23-30? (Wednesday's lesson) People in Jesus' day liked the idea of being rigorous about the Torah because it suited their nationalist ambitions. But it would be a mistake to read these verses as a moral denunciation of *somebody else*. That's halfway to committing the very mistake that's being attacked.
6. Usually we take Jesus' injunction—"go and do likewise"—from the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to apply in this way: go be a good person like the Samaritan (and negatively, do not be like the passers-by). Certainly every culture can use more people like the good Samaritan, but what is the deeper point of the parable? (Thursday's lesson)
7. For first-century Jews, doing what the law required meant being clear about how to fulfill its commandments in practice. If the law says to love your neighbor, you need to know who counts as a "neighbor".
8. Jesus' question requires the lawyer to draw the conclusion that the Samaritan is his neighbor. The lawyer, however, cannot quite bring himself to say "Samaritan," though he obviously knows the answer. He says instead, "the one who showed him mercy." This answer forces one to draw the circle of neighbor as wide as it can get. By the end of the parable the lawyer now has to include the repugnant Samaritan as his neighbor.
9. How did this new understanding, that even the Samaritans are included in the genealogy of the son of God by virtue of the image of God, transform the world in the first centuries? How did the early Christian understanding, that now Peter was as valuable as the Roman centurion Cornelius, transform the world? If the slave Onesimus was as valuable and important as his master Philemon, in this new community that Christ established, and the master Philemon as valuable and important as the Roman governor Sergius Paulus, the world was never to be the same again. How can we model this understanding in our time and world today? What is the contemporary application of these values?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

"Now, if anyone says, 'I love God,' but he hates his brother, he is a liar; . . ."

You see, people might go around and say, "Well, I love God and so I'm not afraid of the judgment." And just as James said, "So you claim to have faith. Show me." So John says, "You

claim to have love. Show me.” It’s interesting. The Bible often does that, doesn’t it? You make claims to be spiritual. Show me! It always shows in the way we behave:

If anyone says, “I love God” [so I have no need to be afraid], but he hates his brother, he is a liar [and in the book of Revelation, where do liars go, as you recall?]; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen. [If we don’t love people created in the image of God, how can we claim to love God whom we have not seen?] And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

And he said in 1 John 3:14 that love for our brethren is the first symptom of salvation, hasn’t he? Do I have the right verse? 1 John 3:14: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”

But if we don’t love each other, we’ve not passed from death unto life. And if we don’t love each other, and yet claim to love God, we’re liars. So he’s tied this all together. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God* in all 66 – 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude, recorded August 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/77MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/78MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

I have heard servants sometimes charge that friends lack a keen sense of justice. They do not leave room in their understanding of God for just and essential punishment. Their God is simply too weak and kind. “You have a marshmallow God,” I heard one servant say.

The truth is precisely the opposite. Friend-believers have great concern about righteousness, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word often translated “justice.” The English word “justice” comes from the Latin translation of the Greek. (Latin, “justitia”)

Friends admire God’s righteousness and would love to be like him. And to do what is right is, of course, to do what is just. But servants tend to think of justice in terms of retribution and punishment.

“I find comfort in the thought that some day God will bring retribution on those who have hurt me so much,” I heard a believer say. “Now, I’m not asking for vengeance, you understand. I’m just asking for justice.” {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 109-110. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<https://speakingwell.wpengine.com/written-materials/servants-or-friends/servants-or-friends-chapter-8>

Further Study with Ellen White

It is not possible for the heart in which Christ abides to be destitute of love. If we love God because He first loved us, we shall love all for whom Christ died. We cannot come in touch with divinity without coming in touch with humanity; for in Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, divinity and humanity are combined. Connected with Christ, we are connected with our fellow men by the golden links of the chain of love. Then the pity and compassion of Christ will be manifest in our life. We shall not wait to have the needy and unfortunate brought to us. We shall not need to be entreated to feel for the woes of others. It will be as natural for us to minister to the needy and suffering as it was for Christ to go about doing good. {COL 384.3}

Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of God's Holy Spirit. In the depths of heathenism, men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education. The "Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), is shining in his soul; and this light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God. {COL 385.1}

Christ brings all true believers into complete oneness with Himself, even the oneness which exists between Him and His Father. The true children of God are bound up with one another and with their Saviour. They are one with Christ in God. {SD 293.5}

When the heavenly principle of eternal love fills the heart, it will flow out to others, not merely because favors are received of them, but because love is the principle of action, and modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and elevates the affections. This love is not contracted, so as merely to include "me and mine," but is as broad as the world and as high as heaven. It is in harmony with that of the angel workers. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the entire life, and sheds a refining influence on all around. Possessing it, we cannot but be happy, let fortune smile or frown. And if we love God with all the heart, we must love His children also. This love is the spirit of God. It is the heavenly adorning that gives true nobility and dignity to the soul. {OHC 175.2}

Love, the basis of creation and of redemption, is the basis of true education. This is made plain in the law that God has given as the guide of life. The first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Mark 12:30. To love Him, the Infinite, the Omniscient One, with the whole strength and mind and heart, means the highest development of every power. It means that in the whole being—the body, the mind, as well as the soul—the image of God is to be restored. {CT 32.1}

Like the first is the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Mark 12:31. The law of love calls for the devotion of body, mind, and soul to the service of God and our fellow

men. And this service, while making us a blessing to others, brings the greatest blessing to ourselves. Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. {CT 32.2}

Kind words are never lost. Jesus records them as if spoken to Himself. Sow the seeds of kindness, of love, and of tenderness, and they will blossom and bear fruit (MS 33, 1911). {6BC 1118.2}

God is the source of life and light and joy to the universe. Like rays of light from the sun, like the streams of water bursting from a living spring, blessings flow out from Him to all His creatures. And wherever the life of God is in the hearts of men, it will flow out to others in love and blessing. {SC 77.1}

Christ presented to men that which was entirely contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God, and sought to impress upon men the love of the Father, who “so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. He urged upon men the necessity of prayer, repentance, confession, and the abandonment of sin. He taught them honesty, forbearance, mercy, and compassion, enjoining upon them to love not only those who loved them, but those who hated them and treated them despitefully. In all this He was revealing to them the character of the Father, who is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and full of goodness and truth. {CT 29.3}

Kind, tender, compassionate words will flow from sanctified hearts and lips. {SD 180.7}

Thus the question, “Who is my neighbor?” is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God. {DA 503.5}