

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2025: *God's Love and Justice*

Lesson 10 "*Rules of Engagement*"

Read for this week's study

Daniel 10:1–14; Revelation 13:1–8; Job 1:1–12; Job 2:1–7; John 12:31; John 14:30; Mark 6:5; Mark 9:29.

Memory Text

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. An Angel Delayed
- III. The Dragon of Revelation
- IV. The Case of Job
- V. The (Temporary) Ruler of This World
- VI. Limits and Rules
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. We have seen so far that the cosmic conflict is primarily a dispute over God's character, prompted by Satan's allegations against God's justice and rule. Insofar as God maintains his commitment to epistemic freedom (his creatures can love him or reject him), the use of force can do nothing to counter such allegations. Therefore, another strategy is required to meet the allegations. Doing so involves parameters, or "rules of engagement," in which the allegations can be settled and defeated once and for all.
2. "Behind the false 'gods' of the nations, were actually demons in disguise. This means, that all of the texts of Scripture dealing with idolatry and the foreign gods are 'cosmic conflict' texts. With this background, the cosmic conflict theme is better understood. And this truth has massive implications for understanding more about the nature of this conflict and how it sheds light on the problem of evil." (Sabbath Afternoon)
3. How would you reconcile and harmonize 1 Corinthians 8:4 ("no idol in the world really exists") and 10:20 (what the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God)? Why do we need to keep this in a healthy balance? What is Paul's argument in

- chap. 10? Why is it important to keep that in mind in our contemporary world which is both materialistic and spiritual at the same time?
4. Since God's very character and government has been challenged, it makes sense that he would operate in a transparent way that involves celestial beings, allowing them and others to see that God is wholly fair, just, and loving. What do you make of the angel sent by God being "withstood" by the "prince of the kingdom of Persia" for three entire weeks (Daniel 10:12-13)? (Sunday's lesson)
 5. "The enemy must be afforded some genuine freedom and power that is not removed capriciously, but is restricted by some parameters known to both parties (the details of which are not revealed to us). It seems there must be parameters in the cosmic conflict that even God's angels are operating within, which in the coming lessons will be referred to as the 'rules of engagement.'" (Sunday's lesson)
 6. How does Revelation 13:1-8 show that Satan possesses jurisdiction over earthly kingdoms? (Monday's lesson) This inevitably means that God's jurisdiction is correspondingly limited. But there are also limitations on Satan and his minions including temporal limits (12:12). How does understanding that "the world is now under the dominion of the powers of darkness and can therefore resist and reject God's authoritative rule" help us better understand what is going on?
 7. How does the case of Job show that God allows some allegations to have a hearing before the heavenly council and be put on display so that creatures can make their own decisions (Job 1:1-12; 2:1-7)? (Tuesday's lesson) If such cosmic allegations are to be answered, God must allow Satan parameters within which he might make his case. Finite beings must be granted some jurisdiction that the omnipotent being cannot override.
 8. Satan is initially restricted, but later brings requests to the heavenly council to have more license to demonstrate his charges. How does this demonstrate not only that Satan works within limits that are known to him and to God, but also that these "rules of engagement" can be modified by agreement before the heavenly council? This helps us understand that given such "rules of engagement," God's action is morally restricted.
 9. How does the fact that Jesus calls Satan the "ruler" of this world help us understand the evil that exists in the world now (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Luke 4:6)? (Wednesday's lesson) How does it indicate that Satan has some rights under which he operates when he says to Jesus, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please"?
 10. What do the texts in Mark 6:5, 9:29 and 11:22-24 convey about how divine action might be integrally related to factors such as faith and prayer? (Thursday's lesson) Although these and other texts do not explain precisely how faith and prayer relate to miracles, there is an explicit correlation. This indicates impediments on what God can morally do which are dynamic and seemingly tied to prayer and faith and perhaps other factors. Because of this, prayer may grant God jurisdiction to act in ways that otherwise would not be available to him within the rules of engagement (GC 525).

Since other factors are involved, it might be that in some situations those other factors are such that no matter how much people pray in good faith, the outcome regarding a specific event would not change (cf. Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:32).

11. Since the cosmic war is not one of sheer force but one of character—a challenge to God’s moral government and thus a battle for hearts and minds—there must be known limits or rules within which his enemies can operate. Thus, this covenantal arrangement is morally justified as the best and only available avenue to settle the cosmic dispute. It will bring the great good of ensuring that love flourishes throughout the universe for eternity. It also serves as the morally sufficient reason for God allowing the existence of evil, without affirming that any such evil itself is justifiable or necessary for God’s creatures to flourish.
12. Although we are not able to make confident or final judgments regarding God’s decisions, we can see a significant biblical principle here: God always does what is best, given the avenues available to him. And this assurance creates trust in God in even the most difficult life situations!

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

I’m not so worried about the beast as I am about the dragon who gives his power to the beast; the one who is behind all the heads. Sometimes we act as if one of the heads is our great enemy. On the contrary. The devil has worked through every false religious system. And it is significant to note that every false religious system has a substitute for the Son of God in one form or another. In the mystery religions that were popular in the days of these early Christians who were hearing this, there were dying, rising saviors who counterfeited the true Christ. So this substituting for the Son of God has gone on from the very beginning. It began up in heaven when Lucifer wished to take the place of the other ‘Lucifer’ in the respect and reverence of the angels.

So if you prefer his side, and you are distinguished in some way as preferring that side, your faith is in him and your loyalty is to him, and you prefer his way of doing things, this is what will happen to you. You will drink the wine of God’s wrath. But we’ve been prepared for wrath for sixty-five books. What is the meaning of God’s wrath? In Hosea 11, in Romans 1, specifically in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28, God’s wrath. He is the Father of the people He is about to give up. So how does He feel? He sadly turns away in loving disappointment from those who prefer the other side. Think of preferring the leadership of the one who led in the torture of the Son of God. But these people prefer his way of doing things. What would God do to those who would rather worship the deceiver than the infinitely trustworthy One? Does He beat them up, or give them up? Remember Hosea 11, where God cries, “How can I give you up, how can I let you go?” We know that is the meaning of God’s wrath. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Revelation*, recorded August 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/79MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/80MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Lou: In this use of James, I want to come back to that one again. James is saying that faith alone is not enough. Does that mean that we also have to have works? And isn't that getting back on dangerous ground?

Graham: That's this same matter of understanding what the "works" are. The word for obedience, as I mentioned, is a "willingness to listen." **God does not expect perfect performance.** I have just gone to my physician with an advanced case of arthritis, and he doesn't ask me to run the four-minute mile on the way home. He even helps me down the steps into my wheelchair, maybe. He says, "Do a little better this week, and be sure to come back, and take your medication." Now, what he asks of me is a "willingness to listen and cooperate."

And I might die the next day, but I'm going to die his trusting patient. And I will arise His trusting patient and all will be well. So the performance God desires of us is the **willingness to listen.** He knows we are too weak to do it perfectly. I think to picture God as our Physician is the best model we could have. God knows our weaknesses. He wants us someday to be perfect; not just spiritually, but physically, mentally, socially—all those things. But He knows it is going to take a little time. What He wants right now up front is a sincere willingness to listen and stop cheating. Then the healing is guaranteed. God has the ability to perfectly restore every one of His children. No question. He has never lost a patient, except the patients who are unwilling to listen. So to know that obedience means primarily a willingness to listen, is the thing.

Lou: And James gives us a picture of what happens in our lives when we are willing to listen.

Graham: Oh, when we are willing to listen, we begin to behave like God—more and more like Him.

Lou: Trust sounds like something we **have** to do. It might sound that way. But doesn't God do it all? Isn't faith, what we've talked about this evening, isn't that faith itself the gift of God?

Graham: It's so described in the Bible. "Faith is a gift of God." This is so important that it is much of the subject next week: "God's Way of Restoring Trust." Well, He gives everything except one thing, I believe. He gives us life. He gives us minds to weigh the evidence. He gives us the evidence. He gives us the freedom. He gives us everything except **He does not cast the vote.** If in this great controversy, in this war, God were also to manipulate us so we would vote the way He wanted, you know who would cry foul.

So God does not win this great controversy by "stuffing His own ballot box," by also putting the faith within us. Then you have the question, "Why does He put faith in some and not others?" And then there's no responsibility. You say, "I don't have faith. You know why? God didn't give me any." And you know what that has led to in theological history. God gives us everything, but **He doesn't cast the vote.** That's up to us. That is what freedom is. That's where responsibility is. And I like it this way. It's a little scary, but would you want it any other way? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #3 with Lou Venden, "All God Asks Is

Trust” 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/3MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

God is the author of truth. He enlightens the darkened understanding and gives to the human mind power to grasp and comprehend the truths which He has revealed. {SL 49.1}

Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an advantage. . . . {4BC 1173.5}

Christ seldom attempted to prove that truth is truth. He illustrated truth in all its bearings, and then left His hearers free to accept or reject it, as they might choose. He did not force anyone to believe. In the sermon on the mount He instructed the people in practical godliness, distinctly outlining their duty. He spoke in such a manner as to commend truth to the conscience. The power manifested by the disciples was revealed in the clearness and earnestness with which they expressed the truth. {Ev 171.1}

The Lord will not compel men to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God; He sets before the human agent good and evil, and makes plain what will be the sure result of following one course or the other. Christ invites us, saying, “Follow Me.” But we are never forced to walk in His footsteps. {CS 138.1}

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world’s dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, “with healing in His wings.” Malachi 4:2. {DA 22.1}

The laws of God are designed to bring His people closer to Himself. He will save them from the evil and lead them to the good if they will be led, but force them He never will. {5T 444.2}

God never forces the will or the conscience; but Satan’s constant resort—to gain control of those whom he cannot otherwise seduce—is compulsion by cruelty. Through fear or force he endeavors to rule the conscience and to secure homage to himself. To accomplish this, he works

through both religious and secular authorities, moving them to the enforcement of human laws in defiance of the law of God. {GC 591.2}

To Daniel was given a vision of fierce beasts, representing the powers of the earth. But the ensign of the Messiah's kingdom is a lamb. While earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power, Christ is to banish every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion. His kingdom was to be established to uplift and ennoble fallen humanity (Letter 32, 1899). {4BC 1171.5}

I saw that God would not compel any to be saved. Jesus has made the great sacrifice, and if man will freely, gladly accept it; if he will choose life, he can have it. But his life must be one of continual yielding. {2SG 278.2}

The enemy cannot overcome the humble learner of Christ, the one who walks prayerfully before the Lord. Christ interposes Himself as a shelter, a retreat, from the assaults of the wicked one. The promise is given, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." . . . {ML 316.2}

Those who follow Christ are ever safe under His watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people. {FLB 328.6}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me." John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. {PP 68.2}

Through the plan of salvation, a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and result of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. {ST, December 22, 1914 par. 4}

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God's thought made audible. In His prayer for His disciples He says, "I have declared unto them Thy name,"—"merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,"—"that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of

the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which "angels desire to look," and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which "seeketh not her own" has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. {DA 19.2}

When Christ came to this world, He found that Satan had everything as he wanted it. The adversary of God and man thought that he was indeed the prince of the earth, but Jesus laid hold of the world to take it out of the power of Satan. {5BC 1137.9}

The transgression of God's law brought woe and death in its train. Through disobedience man's powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened that it was impossible for him to resist the power of evil; and the tempter saw being fulfilled his purpose to thwart the divine plan of man's creation and fill the earth with misery and desolation. Men had chosen a ruler who chained them to his car as captives. {CT 33.2}

Looking upon man, God saw his desperate rebellion, and He devised a remedy. Christ was His gift to the world for man's reconciliation. The Son of God was appointed to come to this earth to take humanity and by His own example to be a great educating power among men. His experience in man's behalf was to enable men to resist Satan's power. He came to mold character and to give mental power, to shed abroad the beams of true education, that the true aim of life might not be lost sight of. The sons of men had had a practical knowledge of evil; Christ came to the world to show them that He had planted for them the tree of life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. {CT 33.3}

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. {SC 105.2}

It is part of God's plan to grant us in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask. {GC 525.2}