

**Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes**  
**First Quarter 2025: *God's Love and Justice***  
**Lesson 8 "Free Will, Love, and Divine Providence"**

**Read for this week's study**

Luke 13:34; Jeremiah 32:17–20; Hebrews 1:3; Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Ephesians 1:9–11; John 16:33.

**Memory Text**

“ ‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ ” (John 16:33, NKJV).

**Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide**

- I. Introduction
- II. Our Sovereign God
- III. *Pantokrator*
- IV. To Love God
- V. God's Ideal and Remedial Wills
- VI. Christ Has Overcome the World
- VII. Further Study

**Questions and Notes for Consideration**

**Facilitator: Daniel Duda**

1. “God's love as depicted in Scripture is far superior to the ideas that pass for “love” in much of our world today. In the coming weeks, we will look more closely at some of the most prominent and beautiful aspects of God's love that are revealed in the Bible. [...] The entire story of Scripture is about what God has done and is doing to restore love to every corner and crevice of the universe. This and much more is the topic of this quarter's lessons.” (Introduction to the quarter)
2. “Providence is the term used to describe God's action in the world. How we think about God's providence makes a huge difference in how we relate to God, how we relate to others, and how we think about the problem of evil.” (Sabbath afternoon)
3. The word “providence” comes from the Latin *providentia* meaning foresight or prudence, and is based on *pro-* “ahead” and *videre* “to see”. What are the consequences if people believe that “nothing happens by chance; everything that happens is God's command or will”?

4. “People sometimes assume that everything that occurs happens just as God wants it to. Whatever happens in the world is precisely as God wanted to have happen. After all, God is almighty. How, then, could anything occur that God does not want to occur?” (Sunday’s lesson) What kind of deep problems, especially in the context of evil, such a theology create?
5. “While many people believe that God must always get what He wants, the Bible tells a quite different story. Over and over, Scripture depicts God as experiencing unfulfilled desires.” (Sunday’s lesson) See Psalm 81:11–14; Isaiah 30:15, 18; Isaiah 66:4; and Luke 13:34. What is the lesson for us that God is a supremely happy being although he has unfulfilled desires? What does a happy and fulfilled life look like for us?
6. What do we mean when we say God is “all-powerful”? (Monday’s lesson) Does it mean that God can do anything? How do you understand the words of Jesus, “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26)? Was it possible for Jesus to come down from the cross (=save himself) and to save others?
7. We are to love God, but God cannot force anyone to love Him, because if love is forced, it is no longer love (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:4, 5) (Tuesday’s lesson) Therefore, it is impossible to force someone freely do something. Why is this important?
8. A lot of misunderstanding of God’s character was caused by the word “predestine,” which in Greek simply means, “to decide beforehand”. The Scripture teaches that God “can decide something beforehand in a way that takes into account the free decisions of others” (Ephesians 1:9-11) (Wednesday lesson)
9. To do this, we need to make a distinction “between what we might call God’s ‘ideal will’ and God’s ‘remedial will.’ God’s ‘ideal will’ is what God actually prefers to occur and which would occur if everyone always did exactly what God desires. God’s ‘remedial will,’ on the other hand, is God’s will that has already taken into account every other factor, including the free decisions of creatures, which sometimes depart from what God prefers.” (Wednesday lesson) How does this help us deal with difficult situations in our lives?
10. If God does not unilaterally control everything that happens, this requires (at least) a two-dimensional view of God’s providence. Some things in this world may be caused by God, but other occurrences are the result of the free decisions of creatures (humans and demons). (Thursday’s lesson) How does this help us to deal with the randomness of the universe? How does it help in difficult situations, when people have to struggle not only with the circumstances, but also the consequences of their bad theology and/or lack of faith? In what sense do Jesus’ words from John 16:33 bring great comfort?
11. Are there ways we can help others understand this when they are going through difficult periods of life? What can we do to help others build a better model that empowers them to cope with reality even before evil strikes? How do we become agents of compassion and empathy within our circle of influence?

## Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: There are two here that we just must not pass up any longer, because they speak so poignantly of where many of us hurt and wonder. “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.’ I have a cousin, age thirty years, who has a malignant brain tumor; and he is awaiting death. There is nothing medically that can be done for him. Everyone tells him, ‘God’s will be done.’ Now the question is, does God will for one to die?” This person just can’t stand that, and they go on to say, “I don’t think so. I believe that sin has contaminated the world and as a result we have disease and death. So please elaborate on this concept, and what’s more, what do you say to such a person? How do you talk about God’s will?”

Graham: That’s too sad to give a snap answer to. I think at times like that we draw from everything we’ve learned and experienced through the years about God in our study of Scripture, and one needs to fall back on the things we are sure of. What God wants for us: He wants us to be well. He created us perfect. Disorder, disease—these are not of His doing. These are all part of being caught up in the consequences of this revolt. But then we do know that God could heal, that’s true. And if He doesn’t seem to be doing it at this time, we might wonder why. But if you should say, “God, I wonder why,” would He be offended? Not for a moment! On the authority of so many cases in Scripture.

But that God would be willing that this person should die? Is He a destructive God? An experience like this really tests the kind of person we believe our God to be. But even if one is not too clear on this, if one has learned that prayer is conversation with God as with a friend, then the one who is wondering would feel perfectly free to kneel down and really talk to God about this, and say, “God, this is not clear. It looks as if You are like this, and that’s the devil’s picture.” Or, “It looks as if You are like that. You couldn’t be, could You? Or are You?” He would not be offended. He honors our questions. And there is great peace that comes from realizing we have a God toward whom we can direct such questions, even in agony at the time. So I think the answer is a long one in a way. Learn the good news about God. But one thing sure, if the Lord were here, how sympathetic He would be! But He would want to clear up the thought, “I’m doing this to you.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #6 with Lou Venden, “Evaluating the Evidence” recorded February 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG>

Lou: We must move on to some other very important questions in this same connection. This phrase, “Thy will be done.” If we really want and mean for God’s will to be done, why ask for anything? Wouldn’t it be more trusting really to just say, “God, do what You’re going to do”?

Graham: Ah, yes. So many things come to mind, but especially watching Jesus do it. He really was an example in almost every important area. He would say to His Father, "Thy will be done; nevertheless, . . ." I think that if prayer is conversation with God, we will be honest with Him. "I do not relish what's coming. I want to understand this, and I want You to do things Your way. I want to defer to Your wisdom. Nevertheless, may I talk to You about this? May I tell You honestly I want this, I want that, I shrink from this, I shrink from that?" That's real, honest conversation. But behind it all, we are going to defer to God's wisdom; of course. I think it underscores the idea that it's genuine, honest conversation.

Lou: But to turn that the other way, there are those who express real concern that when you are praying, for example, for someone who is very seriously ill, a loved one that you very much want to be healed, that it's somehow an expression of a lack of faith, to, after you've said, "Lord, please heal my mother or my child," then to say, "Nevertheless, Thy will be done." Wouldn't it be more trusting to just say, "Lord, heal. I believe You are going to"?

Graham: Because we want to tell Him what to do. It would seem to me, it shows much more trust to say, "God, You know best, and You do that for this person."

Lou: You're saying then that it's perfectly all right to express my will very forcibly, I mean, to tell God exactly what I want.

Graham: Or I'm not telling the truth. I want this person to be well. This is my mother. Please make her well.

Lou: But then is that a lack of trust?

Graham: "Thy will be done" is much more trust.

Lou: Not a lack of faith.

Graham: No, and I love it when the person you are praying for says, "Look, you don't have to dictate to God. He doesn't have to heal me for me to trust Him. I'm willing for Him to do whatever is best, and you may pray that way." And you know from experience, isn't it easy to pray around the bedside when the patient, someone you love especially, trusts God like that. I've had many, many experiences like that. It is very moving. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #15 with Lou Venden, "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>*

## Further Study with Ellen White

It is Satan's settled purpose to cut off all communications between God and His people, that he may practice his deceptive wiles with no voice to warn them of their danger. If he can lead men to distrust the messenger, or to attach no sacredness to the message, he knows that they will feel under no obligation to heed the word of God to them. And when light is set aside as darkness, Satan has things his own way. {LHU 361.2}

If you ask the help of God, you will not ask in vain. The Lord is at work in many ways to win your hearty confidence. In nothing does He take more delight than to have you unburden, come to Him for light and strength, and He has promised that you shall find rest to your soul. If you will find heart and voice to pray, He will be sure to hear, and an arm will be reached down to save you. There is a God that hears prayer, and when all other resources fail, He is your refuge, a very present help in time of trouble. . . . {TDG 184.4}

Christ, the Light of the world, veiled the dazzling splendor of His divinity and came to live as a man among men, that they might, without being consumed, become acquainted with their Creator. Since sin brought separation between man and his Maker, no man has seen God at any time, except as He is manifested through Christ. {MH 419.1}

Since God is infinite, and in Him are all the treasures of wisdom, we may to all eternity be ever searching, ever learning, yet never exhaust the riches of His wisdom, His goodness, or His power. {Ed 172.2}

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will. . . . {CC 250.3}

God does not ask us to do in our own strength the work before us. He has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. {8T 19.1}

There is by our side a witness, a heavenly messenger, who will lift up for us a standard against the enemy. He will shut us in with the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Beyond this Satan cannot penetrate. He cannot pass this shield of holy light. {COL 171.3}

But the power of God is still exercised in upholding the objects of His creation. It is not because the mechanism once set in motion continues to act by its own inherent energy that the pulse beats, and breath follows breath. Every breath, every pulsation of the heart, is an evidence of

the care of Him in whom we live and move and have our being. From the smallest insect to man, every living creature is daily dependent upon His providence. . . . {Ed 130.5}

The light shining from the throne of God upon the cross of Calvary forever puts an end to man-made separations between class and race. Men of every class become members of one family, children of the heavenly King, not through earthly power, but through the love of God who gave Jesus to a life of poverty, affliction, and humiliation, to a death of shame and agony, that He might bring many sons and daughters unto glory. {1SM 258.4}

All heaven has been looking on with interest, and ready to do whatever God might appoint, to help fallen men and women to become what God would have them. God will work for His children, but not without their cooperation. They must have indomitable energy, and a constant desire to become all that it is possible for them to be. {RC 296.3}

No one need look upon the sin against the Holy Ghost as something mysterious and indefinable. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of persistent refusal to respond to the invitation to repent. {FLB 58.8}

God destroys no one. The sinner destroys himself by his own impenitence. When a person once neglects to heed the invitations, reproofs, and warnings of the Spirit of God, his conscience becomes seared, and the next time he is admonished, it will be more difficult to yield obedience than before. And thus with every repetition. Conscience is the voice of God, heard amid the conflict of human passions; when it is resisted, the Spirit of God is grieved. {5T 120.1}

God destroys no man; but after a time the wicked are given up to the destruction they have wrought for themselves. {YI, November 30, 1893 par. 6}

No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. "Man turns from God, not God from him." Our heavenly Father follows us with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests with the sinner. {MB 93.1}

As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings. {COL 333.1}

The salvation of the human race has ever been the object of the councils of heaven. The covenant of mercy was made before the foundation of the world. It has existed from all eternity, and is called the everlasting covenant. So surely as there never was a time when God was not, so surely there never was a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity. {AG 130.2}

God's work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power, to meet the wants of men in the different ages.

Beginning with the first gospel promise, and coming down through the patriarchal and Jewish ages, and even to the present time, there has been a gradual unfolding of the purposes of God in the plan of redemption. . . . He who proclaimed the law from Sinai, and delivered to Moses the precepts of the ritual law, is the same that spoke the sermon on the mount. . . . The Teacher is the same in both dispensations. God's claims are the same. The principles of His government are the same. {AG 130.4}

God never compels the obedience of man. He leaves all free to choose whom they will serve. {PK 510.4}

In matters of conscience the soul must be left untrammelled. No one is to control another's mind, to judge for another, or to prescribe his duty. God gives to every soul freedom to think, and to follow his own convictions. . . . In Christ's kingdom there is no lordly oppression, no compulsion of manner. The angels of heaven do not come to the earth to rule, and to exact homage, but as messengers of mercy, to co-operate with men in uplifting humanity. {DA 550.6}

God does not control our minds without our consent; but every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they may find deliverance in Christ. The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart's unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who consent to enter into covenant with God are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. {MH 93.1}

God does not force anyone. He leaves all free to choose. But He says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." {CTr 14.6}

Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. {MB 142.1}

It is not the plan of God to compel men to yield their wicked unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which to accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture (*Redemption: or the Miracles of Christ*, pp. 112, 113). {1BC 1120.5}

Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will, and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not *desire* to be set free, if we *will* not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7, 8) {HP 346.5}

All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through co-operation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence. {DA 827.3}

God had a knowledge of the events of the future, even before the creation of the world. He did not make His purposes to fit circumstances, but He allowed matters to develop and work out. He did not work to bring about a certain condition of things, but He knew that such a condition would exist. The plan that should be carried out upon the defection of any of the high intelligences of heaven—this is the secret, the mystery which has been hid from ages. And an offering was prepared in the eternal purposes to do the very work which God has done for fallen humanity (ST March 25, 1897). {6BC 1082.3}

The purpose and plan of grace existed from all eternity. Before the foundation of the world it was according to the determinate counsel of God that man should be created, endowed with power to do the divine will. But the defection of man, with all its consequences, was not hidden from the Omnipotent, and yet it did not deter Him from carrying out His eternal purpose; for the Lord would establish His throne in righteousness. God knows the end from the beginning. . . . Therefore redemption was not an afterthought . . . but an eternal purpose to be wrought out for the blessing not only of this atom of a world but for the good of all the worlds which God has created. {AG 129.2}

The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of “the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal” (Romans 16:25, R.V.). It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. . . {RC 23.4}

**Recommended Reading:**

“The Purpose and Plan of Grace” – *The Signs of the Times*, April 25, 1892

<https://egwwritings.org>

“Surpassing Love Revealed in His Plan” – *The Signs of the Times*, December 15, 1914

<https://egwwritings.org>