

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Second Quarter 2026: *Growing in a Relationship With God*

Lesson 9 “Sin, the Gospel, and the Law”

Read for this week’s study

Judges 14; Mark 9:42–48; Romans 3:20; Matthew 5:17, 18; Romans 3:28; Matthew 7:24–29.

Memory Text

“I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts” (Psalm 119:93, 94, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Distractions and Temptations
- III. Strongholds in My Relationship With God
- IV. The Law
- V. The Law and the Gospel
- VI. Knowing *and* Doing
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “This week let’s explore the reason God gave us His law and, when someone transgresses God’s law and consequently sins, what or who can help to restore their relationship with God.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. What does the outcome of Samson’s life teach us about distractions and temptations? (Judges ch. 14 and 16:1, 4, 16, 17) (Sunday’s lesson). Although called by God for a specific purpose, he served God while giving in to temptation. What is the connection between giftedness and character?
3. What facilitates your relationship with God and what are the barriers that prevent you from growing in Christ? How do you understand Jesus’ warning about what causes us to sin in Mark 9:42–48? (Monday’s lesson) Why should we be prepared to reject something which is good and God-given – such as hands, feet and eyes – but which are leading us down the wrong path?
4. What is the essence and function of God’s law? (Romans 3:20 and 1 John 3:4) (Tuesday’s lesson) How can we change our view of the law so that we do not perceive it as restricting us, but strengthening us?

5. How has the law been abused throughout the centuries? What is the relationship between the law and the gospel? How do you understand Jesus' words from Matthew 5:17-18? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. John Wesley brought emphasis on sanctification as the second work of God's grace. Why is it that in Methodism, the emphasis on sanctification did not cause wide-spread legalism, while in Adventism it did? How is that related to our doctrine of judgment?
7. What is the poignant final challenge that Jesus brings to his listeners in conclusion of his Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew 7:24–29; Thursday's lesson) Why does Jesus insist that his hearers will be judged on whether or not they hear his words and do them? Doing what Jesus says or not doing it makes the difference between a house that stays standing in the storm and a house that falls with a great crash.
8. How is this connected with the rock in Matthew 16:18 and God's House which was built upon a rock and comes crashing down in chapter 24? How can we build our lives on Jesus' teaching so that we are part of the 'house' that lasts forever? How are we 'doing' God's words in our time?
9. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching..." (Matthew 7:28) Everyone is amazed, but Jesus is not interested in amazing the crowds. Jesus never went up to people and said, "Admire me." He only said, "Follow me." Jesus wants followers, not admirers. His call, being his disciple, goes beyond casual or cultural Christianity.
10. However, it doesn't mean that followers are perfect; rather, even when we stumble, the call is to recommit and rely on God's help. The metaphor doesn't become a legalistic test of performance, but a grace-invitation to wholehearted discipleship. How can we reflect that as individuals and as a community of faith?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Now we all in the ordinary, legalistic course of events ought to die, and if God let us die, it would prove the truthfulness of His works. But God did not ask us to prove that He told the truth. It was essential that the universe know that the consequences of the wages of sin is death, and to know that it is Satan who's lied when he says that is not true. God had told the truth.

This had to be demonstrated. And back in Romans 3, Paul has said that God showed His Son publicly dying to answer that question, to demonstrate that God is righteous in having apparently overlooked men's former sins. The wages of sin is death has always been true; it always will be true. Disorderly rebelliousness in God's orderly universe will result in death. But the truthfulness of that has been demonstrated by God Himself, He doesn't ask us to do it.

So Paul says, “I’m free from that. I don’t have to die. I’m discharged from this law. Christ has taken care of it.” That is, the old man is gone; he said remember you buried him in baptism. Just as Jesus, who really took care of all this, really was buried. So you symbolize your intention in the light of all that Jesus has said and done, to be through with your old man, to be done with the sins of the past.

Isn’t this the new man and the old man struggling? The convictions of the new man who gladly buried his old man in baptism, and said, “I’d like now to live a better life. I’d like to live as Christ lived.” But almost immediately one succumbs to temptation and disgrace. This happens so often in life that finally one might cry as Paul did, “Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this?” How do you translate this? Mine says “body of death.” I like “doomed body”. He answers, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”

Now, when is this struggle? Is it before a man is converted? And when he’s converted and justified, he from then on has peace not only with God, but with himself. Or is this the struggle that continues after one is converted? The struggle, surely, every Christian has experienced. Or is it perhaps the struggle of a person in the experience of conversion, an experience that might be repeated every time one comes face to face with new truth, and you have to make up your mind again. Am I willing to do it or not? What have you decided? You know how this has been debated through the years.

Incidentally, on this struggle, I think that it’s this experience that comes up most frequently during weeks of prayer. I venture next week a number of individuals will raise this again. I don’t think I’ve ever gone through a week of prayer but what someone has said (maybe they’ve been believers for a long, long time), “I get so discouraged because the good I would do I don’t do.” That seems to be the common lot of believers. And the more eager they are to do what’s right, the more sensitive they are to frequent failure. And this chapter, I feel, is the best basis for a discussion of that problem, and the most encouraging, though one should never stop at the end of seven but always add the first verse of eight. You see, there is no condemnation to the struggling saint. He’s not condemned, for we don’t deal with a legalistic God, but a gracious God, and He knows all about this struggle. He knows we have this old man of sin; He knows he can’t be eliminated with a snap of the fingers—that any moment of carelessness will let him bestir himself and get out of his coffin and trouble us again. Now there’s no excuse, we’re told, for sin, it’s true. But John says, “If we do sin, inexcusably, we still have an advocate with the Father.” There we’re back to that verse at the beginning. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 7, recorded November 1977, 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)

You see, the tendency is to think of sin as failing to live up to a requirement. So one, for example, might tack the Ten Commandments to one's bedroom wall and in the morning you kneel down for morning prayers and you read all 10 and you say, "God help me to make this a good day. Help me not to murder anybody, help me not to commit adultery, help me not to steal," and then you go off to work. And in the evening you come back and kneel down to pray before going to sleep, and you read the Ten, and you say, "Oh, this has indeed been a good day. I didn't murder anyone, I didn't commit adultery today, and I didn't break the Sabbath today because it was Wednesday anyway. I thank Thee, Lord I'm not like other men, like this publican over here. It's been a very good day." And you hop into bed.

And Paul is going to say in the next chapter, "I used to read the commandments that way, until I got down to the 10th, and the 10th suggested that sin happens deep inside, just as Jesus said, 'He who hates his brother is a murderer.'" See, maybe you didn't murder your mother-in-law today, but how did you feel about her? (Why do mothers-in-law have to suffer that sort of illustration?) "And on Sabbath, you see, I was in church today, in fact, I went to first service and Sabbath school, and I went to the Hill Church for second service, and I took out literature all afternoon, God this was a great day." And yet inside I may have been like those people in Amos 8, who were waiting for the sun to go down so they could get ready for the program and open their store Saturday night.

If our hearts are not in it, if this is just an exterior thing, *we may be sinning all the time while apparently keeping the commandments*. And Paul will discuss that in some detail in the next chapter. And he didn't like it when he first saw it. When he realized that the Ten Commandments prohibited even evil desire, "Oh" he said, "my rebelliousness revived. Of course after awhile," he said, "I got to thinking about it and how right that is. It's not enough that I don't kill somebody. What really is required, is that I don't even hate him, in fact, that I love him." For we can only live together in an open free society if we don't even hate each other, we actually love each other. It isn't that we just don't murder each other; it isn't that we don't steal. *We don't even want to steal*. So, sin is rebelliousness, it's an attitude toward these things. So I might be "obeying", but my attitude is bad. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 6, recorded November 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

[http://pkp.cc/11MMROMANS66 \(Part 1\)](http://pkp.cc/11MMROMANS66) [http://pkp.cc/12MMROMANS66 \(Part 2\)](http://pkp.cc/12MMROMANS66)

We usually use 1 John 3:4, and we usually translate that, "Sin is the transgression of the law." But that's a rather expansive translation of one word. And it tempts one to put the Ten Commandments up on the wall and say, "Well, I haven't broken that one, and that one, and that one, and that one, so this has been a rather good day." Paul used to look down the Ten,

and on a Tuesday night when he knelt to pray, he could say, “This has been a good day. I haven’t murdered anybody. I haven’t committed adultery today. I haven’t stolen today. I haven’t broken the Sabbath, because it was Tuesday anyway. I thank Thee, Lord, I am not like this publican over here.” And then he looked at the tenth, and he realized he had been breaking them. Because sin in 1 John 3:4, is not “the transgression of the Law.” The Greek says, “sin is lawlessness.” Sin is a state of mind. It’s an attitude. And that’s what is here. “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, to him it is rebelliousness.” “*Lawlessness*” is the literal Greek word in 1 John 3:4. Moreover, when you think of the fact that it’s God who has told us what to do, and everything He has asked us to do is for our best good, and if we do not do it, that suggests distrust. And you remember in Romans 14, the last verse: “Whatever is not of faith and trust is sin.”

Sin is a breach of trust. And I think we would protect ourselves from a rather mechanical understanding—or *misunderstanding* of sin, if we put these three verses together instead of one. Romans 14, James 4 and 1 John 3. “Sin is lawlessness.” “Sin is knowing what you ought to do but not doing it.” “Sin is a breach of trust.” And I think they’re all in harmony there, aren’t they? You could even put Malachi with it: “Cursed be the cheat.” Not that God hates cheats. He just can’t help cheats. He can’t save and heal cheats. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – 1&2 Peter and James*, recorded July 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:* [http://pkp.cc/75MMPOGIA66 \(Part 1\)](http://pkp.cc/75MMPOGIA66) [http://pkp.cc/76MMPOGIA66 \(Part 2\)](http://pkp.cc/76MMPOGIA66)

One view sees the plan of salvation and God’s gracious provisions, such as the death of Christ on the cross, as being primarily offered to adjust our legal standing in the sight of God. Because as sinners, we are guilty. And guilty as we are, justice and law demand that we be executed. And the only way to avoid being executed—and there are many, various explanations of execution; these are the various views of hell. We all have views of hell, the longer view, the medium view and the shorter view; there are many views of hell. But if God is the executioner, then we do well to be preoccupied with our legal standing. And unless we be forgiven, He will go ahead and do this to us; He must. Law and justice require it. And if He doesn’t go through with this, the universe will conclude He is unjust. And if He’s unjust, you wouldn’t trust Him, and now you’re getting over into the other view, which always amuses me, that if you pursue even the legal view logically to its conclusions you wind up with the other one.

But now in the larger view, which uses all sixty-six books and has no problems with Ellen White at all, it sees sin not as a legal problem. It sees sin as a very real problem that has had devastating consequences on us physically, mentally, spiritually, socially. Sin is a breach of trust, as Romans 14 says. Sin is treachery. Sin is what Lucifer did in the beginning, for which you could

not have called him in before church counsel. I mean, what had he done? Nothing! Except the most devastating thing that can ever be done. Nearly destroyed the universe, that's what he did.

That's how bad it was. And because of this distrust, and the consequential unwillingness to listen and allow God to look after us and heal the damage done, enormous damage has been done to sinners. **We're not in legal trouble, we're in trouble. We're not in danger of being executed, we're dying. That's the difference.** And I believe it makes all the difference in the world. I would not go to a doctor who would kill his patients for not cooperating. But if I'm dying, I need a doctor. And if I go and don't cooperate, I still may die. But my understanding is, that in this larger view, this great controversy view, this sixty-six book view, we're all dying. And if God were to leave us alone, that's it.

But He hasn't. He's pursued us through the years, trying to win us back to trust. And of course, you don't expect people to trust without evidence. You don't make claims; you offer demonstrations; that's the content of the sixty-six books, God's demonstration of the kind of person He is. And the way He's handled this emergency is the greatest demonstration of all. As to, not how He treats His friends, but how He treats His enemies. How He treats the sick and the dying; how does He seek to win them back to trust? And some of us find that very wonderful.

So the purpose of the plan of salvation is not to adjust our legal standing, but the purpose of the plan of salvation is to win us back to trust so He can heal us, which He can readily do, and it is to confirm the trust of the onlooking universe. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Questions People are Asking About the Plan of Salvation, recorded April 1983, Redlands, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

[http://pkp.cc/1MMQUESTP \(Part 1\)](http://pkp.cc/1MMQUESTP) [http://pkp.cc/2MMQUESTP \(Part 2\)](http://pkp.cc/2MMQUESTP)

If you were ever asked to explain why you obey God (assuming that you do), what answer would you give? Would you say, "I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to and He has the power to reward and destroy." Is that why you don't lie and murder? Nothing wrong in those things themselves, but it upsets God when you do that—and that is a dangerous thing to do.

This might be all right for a beginner or for a little child, but it makes God's laws seem so arbitrary. They have no sense in themselves. That kind of obedience does not speak well and truly about our God.

Would you rather say, “I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him.” Is that why you don’t steal or commit adultery? It is not that you see anything wrong in these things in themselves, it’s just that God doesn’t like it when we do that. He has been so good to us, surely we owe it to Him to do the things He has asked us to do, whether they make sense or not.

Again, this does not speak well of God. It might be a little improvement from obeying out of fear or desire for reward. But it still smacks of arbitrariness. It still does not speak well of God, though that is often thought to be the antidote for the first one.

Could you say this? “I do what I do because more and more I am finding it to be right and sensible to do so. How I admire and revere the one who so advised me and even commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity,” hastening to add, “being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to listen to this God and to heed His commandments when He asks me to do something beyond my present understanding.” That says that God is not arbitrary, but that everything He has asked us to do makes such good sense, we should want to do it anyway. If you can say that, then truly God’s law is not a threat to your freedom, and you thank Him for it.

James is thought to be the legalist among the Bible writers. But look at James 2:8, 12, the last on the list:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.” (NIV)

That is James; and even Luther didn’t understand him that way.

And then I ventured to add this at the end. Since Ellen White, whom some of us regard as a real friend of God, since she has often been understood as a legalist, I included one of her many descriptions of real obedience. Look at the bottom:

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation, merely because he is required to do so, will never enter into the joy of obedience. In fact, he does not obey. . . . True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer [Abraham trusted God; and God said, “That’s what I want. That’s righteousness.”]. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 97, 98.)

{Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #12, “God’s Law Is No Threat to Our Freedom” recorded April 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>

Further Study with Ellen White

The tempter has no power to control the will or to force the soul to sin. He may distress, but he cannot contaminate. He can cause agony, but not defilement. {FLB 327.6}

The tempter can never compel us to do evil. He cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control. {DA 125.2}

God has made ample provision for His people; and if they rely upon His strength, they will never become the sport of circumstances. . . . It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel anyone to do evil. Satan attacks us at our weak points, but we need not be overcome. However severe or unexpected the assault, God has provided help for us, and in His strength we may conquer. {PP 421.2}

Christ knows our weakness, and to Him we can go daily for help. It is not necessary for us to gain strength a month ahead. We are to conquer from day to day (MS 28, 1886). {7BC 974.3}

God asks us to live only one day at a time. You need not look a week or a month ahead. *Today* do your best. Today speak and act in a way that will honor God. The promise is, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). {HP 59.6}

The promise is not that we will have strength today for a future emergency, that anticipated future trouble will be provided for beforehand, before it comes to us. We may, if we walk by faith, expect strength and provision for us as fast as our circumstances demand it. We live by faith, not by sight. The Lord's arrangement is for us to ask Him for the very things that we need. The grace of tomorrow will not be given today. Men's necessity is God's opportunity. . . . {OHC 125.2}

We are to keep close to the Source of our strength day by day, and when the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard for us against the enemy. The promise of God is sure, that strength shall be proportioned to our day. We may be confident for the future only in the strength that is given for the present necessities. The experience in God is daily becoming more precious. . . . Do not borrow anxiety for the future. It is today that we are in need. . . . The Lord is our helper, our God, and our strength in every time of need. {OHC 125.5}

We can but look onward to new perplexities in the coming conflict, but we may well look on what is past as well as what is to come, and say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12). "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). The trial will not exceed the strength which shall be given us to bear it. {TDG 58.3}

The way to the throne of God is always open. You cannot always be on your knees in prayer, but your silent petitions may constantly ascend to God for strength and guidance. When tempted, as you will be, you may flee to the secret place of the Most High. His everlasting arms will be underneath you. {CH 362.2}

God's everlasting arm encircles the soul that turns to Him for aid, however feeble that soul may be. {4T 328.1}

God has the world in His hand. We have God on our side. All heaven is waiting and longing for our cooperation. The Lord is supreme. Why then should we fear? The Lord is almighty; why should we tremble? In the past God has delivered His people, and He will be our helper if we will arise in His strength and go forward. {TMK 342.3}

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}

The whole universe had been witness to the scenes at Sinai. In the working out of the two administrations was seen the contrast between the government of God and that of Satan. Again the sinless inhabitants of other worlds beheld the results of Satan's apostasy, and the kind of government he would have established in heaven had he been permitted to bear sway. {PP 335.3}

In the councils of heaven it was decided that principles must be acted upon that would not at once destroy Satan's power; for it was God's purpose to place things upon an eternal basis of security. Time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his government. The heavenly universe must see worked out the principles which Satan declared to be superior to God's principles. God's order must be contrasted with Satan's order. The corrupting principles of Satan's rule must be revealed. The principles of righteousness expressed in God's law must be demonstrated as unchangeable, perfect, eternal.—RH Sept. 7, 1897. {TA 41.1}

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.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 40-42. {CTr 12.7}

The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression. {6BC 1110.4}

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death. {6BC 1110.5}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {GC 493.2}

Before this earth was called into being, God’s law existed. Angels are governed by its principles, and in order for earth to be in harmony with heaven, man also must obey the divine statutes. To man in Eden Christ made known the precepts of the law “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” Job 38:7. The mission of Christ on earth was not to destroy the law, but by His grace to bring man back to obedience to its precepts. {MB 48.1}

There was but one hope for the human race—that into this mass of discordant and corrupting elements might be cast a new leaven; that there might be brought to mankind the power of a new life; that the knowledge of God might be restored to the world. {Ed 76.1}

Christ came to restore this knowledge. He came to set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him. He came to manifest the nature of His law, to reveal in His own character the beauty of holiness. {Ed 76.2}

Christ came to the world with the accumulated love of eternity. Sweeping away the exactions which had encumbered the law of God, He showed that the law is a law of love, an expression of the Divine Goodness. He showed that in obedience to its principles is involved the happiness of mankind, and with it the stability, the very foundation and framework, of human society. {Ed 76.3}

God desires us to be happy, and He gave us the precepts of the law that in obeying them we might have joy. {DA 308.1}

The infinite love of God has been manifested in the gift of His only-begotten Son to redeem a lost race. Christ came to the earth to reveal to men the character of His Father, and His life was filled with deeds of divine tenderness and compassion. {PP 469.2}

That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels. . . The angels

ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. . . The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. {ST, December 30, 1889 par. 4}

God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. {DA 311.2}

Each law of God is an enactment of mercy, love, and saving power. These laws, obeyed, are our life, our salvation, our happiness, our peace [Psalm 119:165 quoted] (Letter 112, 1902). {3BC 1153.6}