Love and Justice: The Two Greatest Commandments

Lesson 12, 1st Quarter March 11-21, 2025

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Sabbath Afternoon March 15

Memory Text:

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" KJV — 1 John 4:20

We are to do all we can to improve the living conditions of others. We are to make the world better than it could be if we were not in it.

"To which are spiritual, restore such as one in the spirit of meekness.' Galatians 6:1. By faith and prayer, pray for the souls of the enemy. Speak words of faith and courage that will be as a healing balsam to the bruised and wounded one. Many, many have fainted and become discouraged in their struggle of life. When one word of sympathy, cheer would have strengthened them to overcome. Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart to him the word of comfort that we are confirmed of God. GW 54.4

"All this is but a fulfillment of the prophecy of the law,—the principle that is illustrated in the story of the good Samaritan, and made manifest in the life of Jesus. His character reveals the true significance of the law, and shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God manifest mercy, kindness, and love toward all men, they also are witnessing to the character of the statutes of heaven. They are bearing testimony to the fact that the law of God is holy, just, and good. But when, like the priest and Levite, professed followers of God are breaking the law which he proclaims to means, for the spirit we manifest toward our brethren declares what is our spirit toward God. The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Beloved, "if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." John 4:20, 12. DA 505.1

Do what you can to make others happy, to make the world better than it is, to let it know that you are in it to do good, not to be burden upon it.

Sunday, March 16

The Two Great Commandments

Read Matthew 22:34–40. How did Jesus answer the lawyer's question?

"The lawyer approached Jesus with a direct question, "Which is the first commandment of all?" The answer of Christ is direct and forcible: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and 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: this is the first commandment." The second is like unto it, namely, this, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." There is none other commandment greater than these." "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." DA 607.1

"Both these commandments are an expression of the principle of love. The first cannot be kept and the second not fulfilled; neither can the second be kept while the first is broken. When God has his rightful place in the throne of the heart, the right place will be given to our neighbor. We shall love our neighbor as himself. And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially. DA 607.2

Read Matthew 19:16–21. How does it answer the question the rich young ruler's question relate to his answers to the lawyer's question in Matthew 22?

"His claim that he had kept the law of God was a deception. He showed that riches were his idol. He could not keep the commandments of God while the world was first in his affections. He loved the gifts of God more than he loved the Giver. Christ had offered the young man fellowship with himself. "Follow Me," He said. But the Saviour was not so much to him as his own name among men or his possessions. To give up his earthly treasure, that was seen, for the heavenly treasure, that was unseen, was too great a sac. He refused the offer of eternal life, and went away, and ever after the world was to receive his worship. Thousands are passing through this ordeal, weighing Christ against the world and many choose the world. Like the young ruler, they turn from the Saviour, saying in their hearts, I will not have this Man as my leader." DA 520.4

Monday, March 17

The Two Greatest Sins

Read Psalm 135:13–19. What does this reveal about a common sin emphasized throughout Scripture?

"Turn ye unto him whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. For in that day every man shall cast away the sins of his hands, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin. Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited." KJV — Isaiah 31:6-8

Because of idolatry, the Assyrian was permitted to take God's ancient people and their pleasant land into captivity. The Assyrian was God's instrument of punishment. The Lord's chastisement was in strictly justice. But, just as some all idols are cast aside, ; yes, as soon as the great revival and reformation takes place in the hearts of the people, ; then the Assyrian (the power that now rules them) shall certainly fall, and God's people shall just as certainly return.

Read Zechariah 7:9–12. According to the prophet Zechariah in this passage, what does God decry? How does it relate to idolatry relate to the two great commandments?

"Job says, 'If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; what shall I do when God rises? and when he visits, what shall I answer him?' ... If I have wished ill unto him that hated me, or have caused the eyes of the wicked to fail, or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; ... if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.' If his same Rule, and the principles of the Decalogue were in our churches and in all our institutions, what a transformation would take place! He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he repay him again.' Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." PM July 1, 1891, par. 17.

Tuesday, March 18

God Loves Justice

Read Psalm 82. How does this psalm express God's concern for justice in this world? What might it mean for us today?

"In his [philosophical] careful safeguarding of the rights and liberties of his subjects, philosophical emphasized the constant interest every member of the human family receives from the Ruler of justice, who rules over all. God's standard in the congregation of the mighty, He judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. Judge the poor and fatherless: I ring to the oppressed and wicked, and "ye shall eat of the fat of the wicked." Psalm 82:1, 3, 4." PK 198.2

"Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" KJV — Micah 6:6, 7

This inquiry by the people in the unfolding of his scripture reveals what they think would be most pleasing to the Lord. They think a gift of some kind from material things is perhaps the most acceptable gift they can offer for the remission of their sins. We with our own eyes actually see this very thing throughout our churches. This same condition obtained in the days of Christ's first advent. The Jews were very particular about paying the tithe even in the minutest item of income, on the mint, anise, and cumin, but they neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith." Matthew 23:23. Honest tithing was to their credit, said the Lord, but tithing should never replace judgment, mercy, and faith. This same answer comes to us today through the prophet Micah.

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" KJV — Micah 6:8

To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God is the greatest gift one can bring to the Lord.

Wednesday, March 19

Called to Establish Justice

Read Matthew 23:23–30. What does Jesus teach here about what is most important? What do you think He means when he refers to "weightier matters"?

"All that God commands is of consequence. Christ recognized the importance of tithes as a duty but declared that the Jews were guilty of neglecting the weightier matters of the law, such as faith in tithing garden herbs, such as mint, anise, and rue; did into cum them, and yet neglected the more a reputation for exactness and sanctity. At the same time their useless restrictions oppressed the people and dishonored God by the sacred system of God's own appointing. They occupied men's minds with trifling distractions, and turned their attention from essential truths. The weighter matters of the law, justice, mercy, and truth, were neglected. "These," Christ said, "ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." DA 617.1

"Other laws had been perverted by the rabbis in like manner. In the directions given through Moses it was forbidden to eat any blood. The use of Levite's flesh, and the flesh of certain other animals, was prohibited, as likely to fill the blood with impurities, and to interfere with the Pharisees did not leave these restrictions as God had given them. They went to unwarranted extremes. Among other things the people were required to strain all the water used, lest it should contain the smallest insect, which might be classed with the unclean animals. Jesus, contrasting the spirit of the law with the letter, declared to the Jews, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." DA 617.2

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." As the whited sepulchres beautiful tombs concealed the putrifying remains within, so the outward holiness of the priests and rulers concealed impurity. Jesus continued: DA 617.3

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." To show their esteem for the dead prophets, the Jews were very zealous in beautifying their tombs, but they did not profit by their teachings, nor give heed to their reproofs. DA 617.4

"In the days of Christ a supercilious regard was cherished for the resting places of the dead, and vast sums of money were lavished upon their decoration. In the sight of God this was idolatry. In their undue regard for the dead, men showed that they did not love God supremely, nor their neighbor as themselves. The same idolatry is carried to great lengths today. Many are guilty of neglecting the widow and the fatherless, the sick and the poor, in order to build expensive monuments for the dead. Time, money, and labor are freely spent for this purpose, while duties to the living—duties which Christ has plainly enjoined—are left undone. DA 618.1

"The Pharisees built the tombs of the prophets, and adorned their sepulchers, and said one to another, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have united with them in shedding the blood of God's servants. At the same time they were planning to take the life of his Son. This proof is a lesson to us. It should open our eyes to the power of Satan to deceive the mind that turns from the light of truth. Many follow in the track of the Pharisees. They revere the memory of the dead prophets, and condemn those who would be their successors if they had lived in this day, they declare, we would gladly have received his teaching; we would never have been partakers in the guilt of those who rejected the Saviour. But when obedience to God requires self-denial and humiliation, these very persons offer their convictions, and refuse obedience. Thus they manifest the same spirit as did the Pharisees when Christ condemned." DA 618.2

Thursday, March 20

Who is My Neighbor?

Read the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. What is this passage saying in light of the cry of the oppressed for mercy and justice and of the kinds of injustices that different people groups have inflicted on "others" throughout human history?

"In giving this lesson, Christ presented the principles of the law in a direct, forcible way, showing His hearers that they had neglected to carry out these principles. His words were so definite and pointed that the listeners could find no opportunity to cavil. The lawyer found in the lesson nothing that he could criticise. His prejudice in regard to the Samaritan was removed. But he had not overcome his national dislike sufficiently to give credit to the Samaritan by name. When Christ had ended His lesson, He turned to the lawyer, and asked, "Which of these three, think thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?" He answered, "He that showed mercy on him." COL 385.1

"Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." Show the same tender kindness to those in need. Thus you will give evidence that you keep the whole law." COL 385.2

"The Samaritan had fulfilled the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thus he had shown that he was a transgressor of the law of God. Instead of obeying the law, he had treated the wounded man as his brother. This Samaritan represents Christ. Our Saviour manifested for us a love that the love of man can never equal. When we were bruised and dying, we had pity upon us. He did not pass us by on the other side, and leave us, helpless and hopeless, to perish. He did not remain in His holy, happy home, where He was beloved by all the heavenly host. He neither cur sore need, He undertook our case, and identified His interests with those of humanity. He died to save His enemies, He prayed for His murderers. Pointing to His wounded hands, He says to us, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before me." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me." "Go, and do thou likewise." Show the same tender kindness to those in need. Thus you will give evidence that you keep the whole law." COL 385.3

"The prest and the Levite had been to worship in the temple whose service was appointed by God Himself. To participate in that service was a great and exalted privilege, and the priest and Levite felt that having been thus honored, it was beneath them to minister to an unknown sufferer by the wayside. Thus they neglected the special opportunity which God had offered them as His agents to bless a fellow being. COL 382.1

"Many today are making a similar mistake. They separate their duties into two distinct classes. The one class is made of great importance, to be neglected to obtain the other. The latter class is made up of so-called little things, in which the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is ignored. The performance of work is left to caprice, subject to inclination or impulse. Thus the character is marred, and the religion of Christ misrepresented. COL 382.2

"There are those who would like to have a meeting in their dignity to minister to suffering humanity. Many look with indifference and contempt upon those who have laid the temple of the soul in ruins. Others neglect poor souls from a different motive. They are working, as they believe, in the cause of Christ, seeking to build up some worthy enterprise. They feel that they are doing a great work, and they cannot stop to notice the wants of the needy and distressed. In advancing their supposedly great work they may even oppress the poor. They may place them in hard and trying positions, requiring more than they can do, and then, if they do not do their work, they will say that it is justifiable because they are, by their work, advancing the cause of Christ. COL 382.3

"Many will allow a brother or a neighbor to struggle unaided under adverse circumstances. Because they profess to be Christians he may be led to think that in their cold selfishness they are representing Christ. Because the Lord's professed servants are not in co-operation with him, the love of God, which should flow forth from them, is in great degree cut off from their fellow men. Satan takes advantage of this state of things to represent God as a cruel tyrant, and to prevent the flowing back to God. He is robbed of the glory due to Him by His holy name. He is robbed of the souls for whom Christ died, souls whom he longs to bring into His kingdom to dwell in His presence through endless ages." COL 383.1

Friday, March 21

Further Thought

The lesson begins by encouraging us to make the world a better place by working to help the oppressed and downtrodden and be interested in seeing them have justice where needed.

Sunday's lesson deals with the two great commandments and the way Jesus addressed them with the lawyer and the rich young ruler. Jesus' response to the lawyer revealed the depth of the commandments, which, he rightly pointed out, depended on the whole decalogue and not just one. The rich young ruler thought he was a commandment keeper, but Jesus' remarks revealed him to be an idolater. His riches were his idol.

Monday's lesson talks about the two greatest sins, idolatry, which is a disregard for the first great commandment, love for God, and ill-treatment of the poor and needy, which is a disregard for second great commandment, love for our neighbors.

Justice is the subject of Tuesday's lesson. God wants us to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with him, He wants justice administered on behalf of the down-trodden and oppressed both in the Church and society.

Wednesday's lesson takes Matthew 23:23-30 to point out Jesus' rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees. They were good at tithing garden herbs, they showed scrupulous regard for sanitation laws and their reverence for those who died for their faith but they omitted the weighter matters of the law, justice, mercy and truth.

Thursday's lesson uses the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 to herald the call for justice and their reverence for those who died for their faith but they omitted the weighter matters of the law, justice, mercy and truth.

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