

# Southern Asia

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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

CHRIST AND HIS LAW

April • May • June 2014

Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide

April | May | June 2014

# Christ and His Law



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

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## The Law and Love

**F**rom the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Why? Because the law, as the foundation of God’s government, expresses the moral integrity of the cosmos; and to overthrow that law would be to overthrow the moral order of the creation itself.

Think about it. If no god existed, and no life either, the universe would be amoral. Not *immoral*, as in having bad morals, but *amoral*, as in having no morals, because nothing in it—such as lifeless rocks hurling through a godless cosmos—could manifest moral qualities.

However, God exists, and humans do as well, and we have been created as moral beings with the capacity to give and to receive love. For this love to exist, however, freedom, *moral* freedom, must exist, too, because love is a moral concept that couldn’t arise in an amoral universe (such as one composed of only rocks and cold space).

Morality, though, means the ability to choose right or wrong, good or evil—and the only way for the universe to be moral, to allow the potential for good or evil, for right or wrong, would be for it to have a law that defines right or wrong.

And, of course, it does have such a law.

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what cov-

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eting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’ ” (*Rom. 7:7, NIV*).

Is it sinful to have red hair? Why not? Because God’s law doesn’t forbid red hair. If it did, as the law forbids covetousness, then having red hair would be a sin. But it cannot be sin if no divine law defines it as such.

Morality without law is as impossible as is thought without mind. Our universe is moral because God created free beings answerable to His law. If there were no law against coveting, there would be no sin of covetousness; if there were no law against red hair, there would be no sin of red headedness—no matter how many red-haired coveters populated the cosmos.

God created humans as creatures who can love. Love, though, can’t exist without freedom, moral freedom. And moral freedom can’t exist without law, moral law. Love rests on freedom, and freedom rests on law. Hence, the core of God’s government, the foundation of that government—a government of love—has to be His law. That’s why Ellen G. White wrote what she did about Satan’s desire “to overthrow the law of God.” The attack on the law is an attack not just on Christ’s character but on the moral order of the creation itself.

Hence, the topic for our quarter: Christ and His law. We will study the law, especially the question of why so many Christians—misunderstanding the relationship between law and grace—have fallen into the trap of denying the continued validity of the Ten Commandments, thus, unwittingly helping the attempt to “overthrow” God’s law.

The Bible, though, is clear: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (*1 John 5:3, NKJV*). The link between our loving God and the keeping of His commandments is stronger than we realize. We can love God because we live in a universe where love can exist, and it can exist because the universe is moral. That morality is based, at least for us as created beings, on God’s moral law—the subject we will now explore.

*The link between  
our loving God  
and the keeping of  
His commandments  
is stronger than  
we realize.*

*Keith Augustus Burton is a professor of religion at Oakwood University, where he also serves as the coordinator of the Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations. His doctoral dissertation from Northwestern University focused on the role of the law in Paul’s letter to the Romans.*

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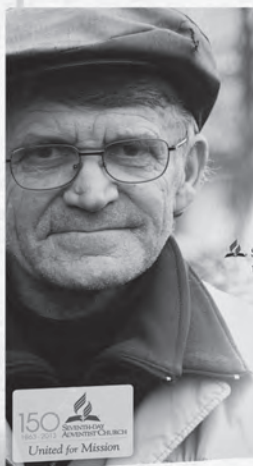
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# Laws *in* Christ's Day



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 2:1–5, Heb. 10:28, Deut. 17:2–6, Lev. 1:1–9, Luke 14:1–6, James 2:8–12.*

**Memory Text:** “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves” (*Romans 2:14, NASB*).

**I**n most societies, various laws function at the same time. There can be general laws that apply to everyone and, simultaneously, local laws that prevail in one community but not in another.

In New Testament times, when a person used the common word for “law” (*nomos* in Greek, *lex* in Latin, and *Torah* in Hebrew), he or she could have been referring to any one of a number of laws. Often the only indicator as to the exact law being discussed was the context of the conversation. Thus, as we study this quarter, we’ll always need to keep the immediate context in mind in order to understand best what law is being discussed.

This week’s lesson investigates the various laws that functioned in the community during the time of Christ and the early church. We will study these various laws but only in the context of helping to set a foundation for the study of the law that will be the major focus of this quarter—God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments.

\* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 5.*

## Roman Law

**Read** Luke 2:1–5. What lessons can we learn from the ways in which these two faithful followers of the Lord interacted with their political environment?

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Since the time of the early republic, the Romans recognized how important written laws were for the governance of society. In fact, the system of constitutional law established by the Romans remains a foundation of the legal systems found in many of today's democratic societies.

For the most part, Rome allowed vassal kingdoms to maintain their own customs, but all subjects were expected to obey imperial and senatorial laws. Obviously, this included Joseph and Mary.

Roman law was concerned with order in society. As such, it not only addressed issues of government but also legislated behavior in the domestic arena. In addition to stipulating the procedures for selecting people to public office, Roman law also dealt with things such as adultery and master/slave relationships. Many of the social codes are similar to the ones found in the Old Testament and other societies.

All attempts to understand the culture in which the New Testament books were composed must take into account the fact that the Roman Empire formed the political backdrop for the world in which Jesus and the early church lived. Many things taking place in the New Testament, from the death of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul, make much better sense when we understand whatever we can about the environment of their times. Of course, one doesn't need to be a scholar of Roman history in order to understand that which we need for salvation. However, when it is possible for us to obtain it, historical knowledge can indeed be helpful.

**Despite the amazing providences of Mary's pregnancy and the obvious hand of the Lord in it, these two people still obeyed the law of the land, which required them to leave their home, even when Mary was quite far along in her pregnancy. Would it not have been better simply to have stayed home, considering the extraordinary circumstances? What might their actions say to us about how we should relate to civil law? (Think how easy it would have been for them to have justified not obeying.)**



## Mosaic Law: Civic

Although the Jews were under Roman rule at the time of Jesus, they were granted authority over those issues that were unique to their customs and religion (*see Acts 18:15*). The legislative body responsible for administering Jewish law was called the Sanhedrin. Sometimes referred to as the council (*John 11:47, Acts 5:27*), the Sanhedrin consisted of 71 men selected from among the priests, elders, and rabbis and was presided over by the high priest. It served as a type of Supreme Court that dealt with Jewish customs, traditions, and laws.

Jewish societal law was founded upon the civil codes revealed in the five books of Moses. Because Moses was the author of the first five biblical books, the laws are referred to as the law of Moses. When God originally gave the laws to Moses, He envisioned a state where He would be the head and the people would enforce His legal mandates. By the time of Jesus, the Jews were subject to Roman law. However, the Roman government allowed them to use Mosaic law in order to settle issues relating to their customs. Here is where the work of the Sanhedrin was especially important.

The New Testament provides several examples of the Mosaic law being applied, or alluded to, in civic matters: Jewish men were still expected to pay the half shekel temple tax (*Matt. 17:24–27, Exod. 30:13*); divorces were still being governed by the stipulations set forth by Moses (*Matt. 19:7, Deut. 24:1–4*); people still adhered to the law of levirate marriage, in which a widow was to marry her husband's brother (*Matt. 22:24, Deut. 25:5*); boys were still circumcised on the eighth day (*John 7:23, Lev. 12:3*); and adulterers were to be punished by stoning (*John 8:5; Deut. 22:23, 24*).

**Read** Matthew 26:59–61, Hebrews 10:28, and Deuteronomy 17:2–6. What important principle is seen here? What does this tell us about biblical concepts of justice and fairness?

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Read some of the civil legislation found in the early books of the Bible. Some of those laws do seem strange to us, don't they? (See, for example, Deuteronomy 21.) Considering who the Author is of these laws, what should this tell us about how we must learn to trust the Lord in all things, especially those things we don't fully understand?

## Mosaic Law: Ceremonial

**Read** Leviticus 1:1–9, 2:14–16, 5:11–13. To what are these laws referring? What was their purpose? What important truths were they meant to teach?

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Besides the civil laws in ancient Israel, there was also what is often called the “ceremonial law.” This law centered around the sanctuary and its services, all of which, of course, were designed to teach the children of Israel the plan of salvation and point them to the coming Messiah. In the texts for today, twice it is mentioned that through these services, “atonement” would be made. In their own way, these laws were what has been deemed “miniprophecies” of Christ and His work of atonement for the sins of His people.

“The ceremonial law was given by Christ. Even after it was no longer to be observed, Paul presented it before the Jews in its true position and value, showing its place in the plan of redemption and its relation to the work of Christ; and the great apostle pronounces this law glorious, worthy of its divine Originator. The solemn service of the sanctuary typified the grand truths that were to be revealed through successive generations. . . . Thus through age after age of darkness and apostasy faith was kept alive in the hearts of men until the time came for the advent of the promised Messiah.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 367.

Though instituted by Jesus, the ceremonial system was meant to function only as a type, a symbol of a future reality—the coming of Jesus and His death and High Priestly ministry. Once He completed His work on earth, this old system—along with its sacrifices and rituals and feasts—no longer was needed (*see Heb. 9:9–12*). Though we no longer keep the ceremonial law today, by studying it we can garner insights into the plan of salvation.

**Central to the sanctuary service was the sacrifice of the animals, which pointed to the death of Jesus. Think what it means that our salvation could come only through His death on our behalf. What should this tell us about just how costly sin is?**

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## Rabbinic Law

In addition to the Mosaic laws, Jews at the time of Jesus were also familiar with the law of the rabbis. The rabbis were the scholastic arm of the Pharisees, and they took the responsibility of ensuring that the Mosaic law remained relevant to the people. The rabbis counted 613 laws in the five books of Moses (including 39 pertaining to the Sabbath), and they used these laws as the basis for their legislation. They supplemented these written laws with an oral law that consisted of the interpretations of leading rabbis.

Oral law is known as *halakah*, which means “to walk.” The rabbis felt that if the people adhered to their numerous *halakoth* (plural of *halakah*), they would walk in the way of the 613 major laws. Although originating as oral law, the rabbinic *halakoth* were collated and recorded in book form. Some of the interpretations from Jesus’ day survive in commentaries known as *Midrash*, while others are recorded in a legal collection called *Mishnah*. Many religious Jews through the ages, and even today, seek to adhere strictly to these laws.

**Read** Luke 14:1–6 and John 9. Although Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath with His miraculous healings, where can you find in the Old Testament that it’s a sin to heal on the Sabbath day? How does the answer help us to understand some of the issues with which Jesus had to address? More important, what lessons can we learn from these incidents that could help us to make sure that we don’t make similar mistakes in our attempts to “walk in the way” faithfully?

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Though it’s easy from our perspective today to deride many of these oral laws, especially when they were used as they were against Jesus, the fault exists more with the attitude of the leaders and not with these laws themselves. Though often kept very legalistically, *halakoth* were meant to be very spiritual, infusing a spiritual element into the most mundane of actions, giving them a religious significance.

**How can we learn to give even the most mundane tasks a religious significance?**

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## The Moral Law

However much Roman law, Mosaic law, and rabbinic law impacted the lives of Jews living in first-century Israel, many people who followed the religion of Israel lived outside of Palestine and beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. Thus, many of these laws would not have played a big role in their lives.

At the same time, however, anyone professing to be a follower of the God of Israel would have adhered to the Ten Commandments.

“The Ten Commandments provide Israel with the moral framework for maintaining it [their relationship with God]. The metaphor that the Bible uses to express this relationship is covenant. While the metaphor comes from the sphere of international law, it is wrong to understand the commandments merely as a summary of Israel’s obligations toward God. . . . Israel’s obedience to the commandments was not a matter of submission to the divine will as much as it was a response to love.” —Leslie J. Hoppe, “Ten Commandments,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1285.

The Ten Commandments surpassed any system of law known to Jews in the first century. Even the Pharisees, who had meticulously memorized the 613 Mosaic laws, recognized the importance of the Ten Commandments. The division of the *Mishnah* called *Tamid* (5:1) contains a rabbinic command to recite the Ten Commandments daily. It was believed that all the other laws were contained in the Ten Commandments. In fact, the Jewish philosopher Philo, who was a contemporary of Jesus, wrote an entire book on the central place the Ten Commandments held among all biblical law.

**Read** Matthew 19:16–19, Romans 13:8–10, and James 2:8–12. What do these verses say about the role that the Ten Commandments play in the lives of those who are followers of Christ?

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Like their Jewish counterparts, the inspired writers of the New Testament recognized the purpose of the Ten Commandments for God’s people. Although some of the lessons for this quarter will discuss the way in which Christ interacted with other systems of law in His day, the primary emphasis will be on His relationship to the Ten Commandments—what is often known as “the moral law.”

**Further Study:** Read also Ellen G. White, “Oath Taking,” pp. 201–204, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1.

“If Adam had not transgressed the law of God, the ceremonial law would never have been instituted. The gospel of good news was first given to Adam in the declaration made to him that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head; and it was handed down through successive generations to Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The knowledge of God’s law, and the plan of salvation were imparted to Adam and Eve by Christ Himself. They carefully treasured the important lesson, and transmitted it by word of mouth, to their children, and children’s children. Thus the knowledge of God’s law was preserved.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 230.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Long before Moses penned the laws that were to govern Israel, the Egyptians and Babylonians had systems of societal laws that were, in some cases, similar in content to some of God’s laws. Even atheistic societies have laws that protect people and property. Law, though, is often based on moral concepts; that is, law should encourage people to refrain from certain types of evil and to do certain types of good. From where, though, do societies get their sense of good and evil?
- 2 How does the whole concept of good and evil impact the question of God’s existence? In other words, if there is no God, from where do the concepts of good and evil come? From where is the only place that they could come if no God existed?
- 3 We often use the concept of “law” in different ways. We talk about the law of gravity, the law of motion. We talk about international law. We talk about the law of the land. We talk about tax law. What do all of these laws have in common? In what ways do they differ? What is the probable consequence of violating any of these laws? What are the benefits of cooperating with these laws? How do the principles of law help you to understand the purpose of the Ten Commandments as it relates to the life of believers?
- 4 In class, go back to Wednesday’s lesson and deal with the issue of how we as a church need to be careful that we don’t make the same mistake that some of the leaders did by adding burdens to the law that were never meant to be there. Why is such a mistake easier to make than we might think, no matter how well-meaning we might be?

## A Life of Influence

Elizabeth Kimongo was born into a traditional Maasai family in Kenya. In her culture, girls are expected to marry soon after their twelfth birthday. Women have little say about their lives, but Elizabeth refused to leave school to marry. She had a dream.

While home for vacation before starting high school, Elizabeth learned her father had arranged for her to marry an older man. With her mother's blessing, she escaped and returned to her Seventh-day Adventist school.

During high school, Elizabeth took her stand for Christ and later was baptized. When she told her mother that she wanted to study at the Adventist university, her mother encouraged her to go.

Elizabeth is majoring in agriculture, a field that will help her teach her people how to preserve their land and provide a better life. She works on campus and receives some scholarship funds to help her pay her school fees. Sometimes she must take a semester off to work full time to earn the money to continue her studies.

Elizabeth's example has helped her younger sisters stay in school and avoid early marriage. Her father, once angry that his daughter would refuse to marry the man of his choice, now accepts her decision. But he pressures her younger sisters to marry this man. Elizabeth encourages her sisters to walk close to God and to continue their studies to make a better life.

Elizabeth urges other Maasai girls to study hard and trust in God. "Don't allow life's circumstances to steal your life away," she says. "Satan wants to destroy you. You must trust God and not let Satan have his way."

Elizabeth is old enough now that her community will not force her to marry. They accept her as an adult woman who can make her own decisions. "I want to teach my people by example how to produce better crops for a better life," she says. "The village has given me a piece of land that

I use to plant crops so that my fellow villagers can see for themselves the success they can have by following my example."

Elizabeth is grateful for Adventist schools that have prepared her to live a life of influence among her Maasai people. Our mission offerings and Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings help these schools reach young people in all walks of life, including Maasai girls in the heart of eastern Africa. Thank you.



*ELIZABETH KIMONGO will soon complete her studies and return to her village to work for her people and share God's love among them.*



# Christ *and the Law of Moses*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 2:21–24; Exod. 13:2, 12; Luke 2:41–52; Matt. 17:24–27; John 8:1–11; Deut. 22:23, 24.*

**Memory Text:** “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (*John 5:46, NRSV*).

Many Christians have been raised on stories about Jesus' supposedly negative relationship to the Jewish religion, an unfortunate misconception that has only helped feed anti-Semitism through the centuries. Jesus spoke out against abuses of the religion, that's true, but not against the religion itself. After all, He was the founder of it.

Indeed, the Gospel accounts of His life and ministry show that Jesus was a faithful Jew fully immersed in Jewish culture from the moment of His birth to the final week of His life in human flesh.

Like every loyal Jew in the first century, Jesus was subject to the Mosaic law. Raised in a home with loyal Jewish parents, He fully appreciated His rich earthly heritage, which was rooted in Divine providence. He knew that God Himself had inspired Moses to pen these laws, with the purpose of creating a society that reflected His will and served as a beacon to the nations. He adhered faithfully to the letter of the law. From circumcision to His visit to the temple to the feasts and to His attitude about taxes, Jesus remained steadfastly faithful to a system that, He knew, would over time be fulfilled through His death and His ministry in heaven.

This week we'll look at more of the laws that Jesus Himself kept.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 12.

## Circumcision and Dedication *(Luke 2:21–24)*

God established His covenant with Abraham, saying that he would be the father of many nations (*Gen. 17:4*). When God made this covenant, the 99-year-old Abraham had only recently fathered Ishmael and had not yet seen the birth of his promised son, Isaac. Nonetheless, he was commanded to circumcise himself along with every male member of his household, and he was instructed to ensure that every son born into his household from that day forth be circumcised on the eighth day (*Gen. 17:9–12*). So important was this sign that the circumcision took place even if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath (*Lev. 12:3, John 7:22*).

This truth gives us a better understanding of the earliest days of Jesus’ life. The Gospels do show that Joseph and Mary were chosen to be the earthly parents of Jesus at least in part because of their piety. Joseph is described as a “righteous man” (*Matt. 1:19, NASB*), and Mary is said to have “found favor with God” (*Luke 1:30, NASB*). When Jesus was eight days old, His parents held a naming and circumcision ceremony in the same manner as an untold number of Hebrew males had experienced in times past.

Imagine, the spotless Son of God, now in human form, undergoing the very ritual that He Himself had instituted many centuries earlier!

**Read** Luke 2:21–24 in light of Exodus 13:2, 12 and Leviticus 12:1–8. What more do these texts tell us about Joseph and Mary? What can we learn for ourselves, in our own time and sphere, from their example?

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The Bible is clear that Mary was a virgin when she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus (*Luke 1:27*); so, Jesus was the first child that “opened her womb.” According to Exodus 13, every firstborn among the Israelites (whether animal or human) was to be dedicated to the Lord. The law also stipulated in Leviticus 12:2–5 that after the birth of a male child, the woman was ceremonially unclean for a total of 40 days (80 for a female child). At the end of this period, she was required to show herself to the priest and offer a sacrifice. As pious Jews, Mary and Joseph meticulously fulfilled the obligations of the Mosaic law and ensured that the Son of God bore the marks of the covenant.

## **Jewish Feasts** (*John 5:1*)

**“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem”** (*John 5:1, NKJV*).

The first major festival period in the Jewish calendar year is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which commences with Passover. The festival commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, when the angel of death *passed over* the homes of those who put the blood on their doorposts. The Gospels record three occasions when Jesus celebrated Passover (*Luke 2:41–43, John 2:13–23, Matt. 26:17–20*).

Fifty days after Passover came the feast of *Shavuot*, often referred to by its Greek name, *Pentecost*. Although the Scriptures don’t provide a reason for Pentecost, the rabbis believed that it commemorated the giving of the law to Moses. There is no record in the Gospels that Jesus celebrated Pentecost. However, before His ascension He counseled His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:4, 5*). This event actually occurred on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 2:1–4*).

The final festival season in the Jewish calendar were the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The Day of Atonement signifies the day on which sin was cleansed from the camp and the people were at one with God. Booths commemorates the time when Israel had to live in tents in the wilderness.

In addition to the feasts of Moses’ laws, the Jews have two other festivals that commemorate God’s historical intervention. The first is Purim, which marks the deliverance of the Jewish people from genocide, when Esther appealed to the Persian king. The second is Hanukah, also known as the Feast of Dedication (*John 10:22*), which celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks in 164 B.C.

Of course, the biblical feasts were done away with long ago, at least as far as Christians are concerned. They all met their fulfillment in Christ. However, we can learn a great deal through studying them and the messages that they contain, because all of them teach lessons about God’s saving grace and power to deliver.

**Though we no longer keep the feasts, what things can we do that help to keep before us the reality of God, what He has done for us, and what He asks of us?**

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## Jesus in the Temple

The New Testament does not tell us too much about the childhood of Jesus. One account, though, that gives great insight is Luke 2:41–52, the story of Jesus and His parents' visit to Jerusalem during the Feast of Passover. Read it over and then answer the following questions:

**How** does this story help to illustrate the decidedly Jewish character of the Gospels and how central the religion was to all that took place?

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**How** is it significant that this story took place during the Passover?

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**For** how many days were Jesus' parents not able to find Him? Of what does that remind you?

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**Though** Jesus was an obedient child, His answer to His parents appears to be almost a rebuke. What important point does His reply contain? What does this say to all of us about what must have top priority in our lives?

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Read Luke 2:51. What does it mean that He was “subject” to them? How does this verse give us even more insight into the amazing condescension on the part of God for our salvation? What can this teach us about the need for submission in the right time and place?

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## Taxes (*Matt. 17:24–27*)

As last week’s lesson noted, the law of Moses had both civic and ceremonial components. The ceremonial aspect means that the temple was at the center of Jewish religious life. In fact, by the first century, the temple was probably the only remaining structure that gave the Jews any sense of national identity.

The temple that stood in Jerusalem was undergoing renovations during Jesus’ ministry. Herod the Great had started the grandiose project in about 20 B.C., and it would not be fully completed until A.D. 66. Recognizing how serious many Jews were about their faith, the Romans allowed the Jews to collect their own taxes in order to cover the costs involved with the maintenance of the temple. Every Jewish male over the age of 20 was to pay the half-shekel tax regardless of his economic status (*Exod. 30:13, 38:26*).

**Read** Matthew 17:24–27. What did Jesus mean when He said: “Lest we should offend them”? What principle do we find here that we should apply in our own lives, as well?

It seems that the temple tax collectors traveled throughout the provinces to ensure that every male fulfilled his legal obligation. Peter’s initial response to the tax collectors gives the impression that Jesus regularly paid His taxes (*Matt. 17:24, 25*). However, as the Son of God, Jesus appears to question the appropriateness of having to pay taxes for the upkeep of His Father’s house.

“If Jesus had paid the tribute without a protest, He would virtually have acknowledged the justice of the claim [that He was under obligation to pay], and would thus have denied His divinity. But while He saw good to meet the demand, He denied the claim upon which it was based. In providing for the payment of the tribute He gave evidence of His divine character. It was made manifest that He was one with God, and therefore was not under tribute as a mere subject of the kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 434.

Notwithstanding, Jesus chose to comply with the authorities and directed Peter to retrieve the tax from the mouth of the first fish that he caught. The shekel in the fish’s mouth was enough to cover the tax for both Jesus and Peter.

**Jesus paid His temple tax even though He knew that the magnificent structure would soon be destroyed (*Matt. 24:1, 2*). What should this tell us about our obligations to be faithful in our tithes and offerings, regardless of whatever problems we believe exist?**

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## Law Enforcement *(Matt. 5:17–20)*

As we have seen, Jesus was a faithful citizen who fulfilled His responsibilities as a Jewish male, even when His life was in danger (*see, for example, John 7:1, 25, 26; 10:31*). In fact, Jesus makes it clear that it was not His purpose to abolish “‘the Law or the Prophets’” (*Matt. 5:17–20, NKJV*).

**How**, then, are we to understand **John 8:1–11** and **Matthew 19:1–9** in light of **Deuteronomy 22:23, 24** and **24:1–4**? What is happening here?

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Some of the Pharisees were always trying to expose Jesus as a law-breaker (*see, for example, John 8:6*). When they present Him with the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, they pose this question: Moses says she should be stoned; what do You say? Interestingly enough, Jesus does not directly respond to their inquiry. In fact, He affirms the law of Moses with His response, “‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first’” (*John 8:7, NKJV*). He isn’t saying that she shouldn’t be stoned; He simply forces these men to see their own violations of the law. Even the woman’s release is in harmony with the law of Moses, because there is none to point an accusing finger, and at least two witnesses are needed to administer justice (*Deut. 17:6*).

In the incident concerning divorce and remarriage, Jesus appears to contradict the law of Moses with His insistence that there were originally no grounds for divorce (*Matt. 19:4–6*). When the Pharisees point to Moses’ commandment in Deuteronomy 24:1–4, Jesus places everything in perspective. Nowhere does Moses command that divorce should take place. However, because of the people’s obstinacy, Moses made an allowance for divorce (*Matt. 19:8*). Thus, we see that even when Jesus critiques a Mosaic law, He does not set it aside. Jesus was a faithful Jew in every way, adhering to the laws of Moses.

**How do we learn to balance justice and grace for those who, like ourselves, fall into sin? If we are going to err, as we as fallen beings inevitably do, what side is it better to err on, and why?**

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**Further Study:** For more information on this week’s topic, read Ellen G. White, “At the Feast of Tabernacles,” pp. 447–454; “Among Snares,” pp. 455–462, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Three times a year the Jews were required to assemble at Jerusalem for religious purposes. Enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, Israel’s invisible Leader had given the directions in regard to these gatherings. During the captivity of the Jews, they could not be observed; but when the people were restored to their own land, the observance of these memorials was once more begun. It was God’s design that these anniversaries should call Him to the minds of the people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 447.

“It was natural for the parents of Jesus to look upon Him as their own child. He was daily with them, His life in many respects was like that of other children, and it was difficult for them to realize that He was the Son of God. They were in danger of failing to appreciate the blessing granted them in the presence of the world’s Redeemer. The grief of their separation from Him, and the gentle reproof which His words conveyed, were designed to impress them with the sacredness of their trust.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 81.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell on the incredible truth that though Jesus instituted these laws, when He enters into humanity He places Himself under them. What does this tell us about the character of God?
- 2 Try to put yourself in the position of Joseph and Mary. Is it any wonder that they didn’t fully understand all that was involved with Jesus? Are there not a lot of things about Jesus that we don’t understand either? How can we learn to trust and obey, despite the many things that we don’t understand?
- 3 What would you say to a Christian who argues that we are to keep the feasts? (Hint: You might start by asking, “How do you intend to keep them, given that the feasts all centered around the temple, which has long been destroyed, and the shedding of blood, which has stopped?”)

## An Offering of Praise

Yesuvadian was in his 60s when he first met Jesus through a dream. God called him to serve Him, and Yesuvadian answered. He left his farm to his family and walked away to follow God's leading.

For several years, he walked from village to village, sharing his newfound faith in God with others. In the past 25 years, he has led more than four hundred people to Christ, revived three dying churches, and started four new congregations. When the local field saw what Yesuvadian was doing, they offered him a stipend to help him.

When Yesuvadian finds a dying church, he visits the people in the area and leads them to Jesus. Then he oversees the work to rebuild the church so that the growing congregation has a suitable house in which to worship.

When he finds a village without believers, he settles among the people and begins planting seeds of faith. He stays until a congregation and a simple church building have been raised.

Recently, Yesuvadian walked to a village and began seeking out people who were willing to hear about Jesus. He began studying the Bible with them, and their interest grew. Yesuvadian has spent two years in that village and continues working there. So far more than twenty people have been baptized, and the congregation is growing stronger. But Yesuvadian, now in his 80s, is thinking of moving on to start a new congregation someplace else. While he's waiting for God's call, he's helping to give Bible studies for an upcoming series of meetings to be held in a central town nearby.

"God has blessed me in so many ways," Yesuvadian says. "He leads me to the rich and poor alike. He leads me to those who want to know more about God. I stay and study with anyone who wants to hear God's message." While some of the people he studies with are from a Christian background, many are not. He finds special needs in the village and tries to help meet those needs, whether it's for food or clothes or community support.

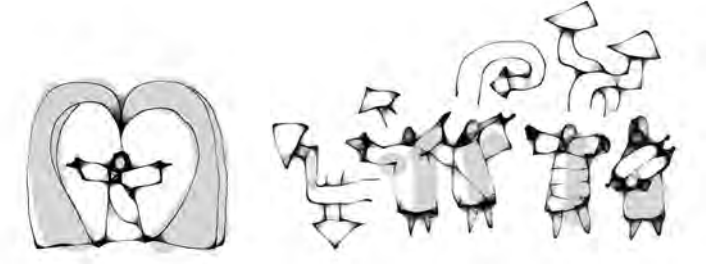


"I have no intention of retiring," he says with a smile spreading across his weathered face. "I'm looking forward to holding another series of meetings, raising up another church." Usually Yesuvadian doesn't preach, but he invites evangelists to come and speak at the evangelistic meetings after he has tilled the soil and planted seeds of faith.

"God has shown me His love and given me strength to do His work," he says. "Sharing my faith is my offering of praise to my God."

*YESUVADIAN, a former farmer, shares his faith with others in southeastern India.*

# Christ *and* Religious Tradition



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 23:1–7, Matt. 15:1–6, Isa. 29:13, Matt. 5:17–20, Rom. 10:3.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘ “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” ’ ” (*Matthew 15:8, 9, RSV*).

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, suggested that one's theology is influenced by four factors: faith, reason, Scripture, and tradition. He didn't mean, however, that all sides are equally authoritative. He acknowledged that the Bible was foundational, but he also recognized that one's individual faith, ability to reason, and religious tradition affect the way in which the Bible is interpreted. If Wesley were brought back to life today, he would be shocked to discover that many modern theologians in the Wesleyan tradition (and other traditions, as well) now value reason, tradition, or personal opinion over the clear teaching of Scripture.

This week's lesson investigates the religious traditions upon which the scribes and Pharisees based many of their teachings. The rabbis who originally penned these traditions greatly respected the Scriptures and had no intention for these traditions to be elevated to the status of God's Word. However, some of their zealous disciples confused the method with the message and in doing so shifted the focus from God's written revelation to human tradition.

\* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.*

## Seat of Moses

While the “scribes and Pharisees” appear to be two separate groups who just happened to be lumped together, the scribes were likely a subset of the Pharisees (*see Acts 23:9*). The Pharisees became a visible group during the time of the Grecian Empire. They are believed to be the remnants of a pious Jewish sect, known as the *Hasidim*, who helped to fight in the Maccabean revolution against Greece.

The name *Pharisees* is derived from the Hebrew *paras*, which means “to separate.” In an age when many Jews had become greatly influenced by pagan cultures, the Pharisees saw it as their duty to ensure that every Jewish male was taught the law. To accomplish this task, they established the position of *rabbi*, which literally means “my great one” or “my teacher.”

In saying that the “scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” Jesus acknowledged their positions as teachers of the people (*Matt. 23:2, 3, NKJV*). After all, at least they had taken the responsibility to ensure that the people were instructed in the way of the law.

**Read Matthew 23:1–7. From these verses, what was one of Jesus’ biggest problems with the scribes and Pharisees?**

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Most of the references to the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospels are negative, and considering the complicity that many (but not all) had in the death of Jesus and the persecution of His followers, that negativity was well deserved. Members of these groups seemed to be lurking around corners and hiding behind trees just waiting for people to make mistakes so they could enforce the law against them. This image of the Pharisee is so frequent in Scripture that the word is often used as a synonym for *legalist*. As we look closely at this text, we find that Jesus’ big problem with the Pharisees was not so much that they wanted others to keep the law of Moses but that they themselves were not keeping it. They were hypocritical—they said one thing, but did another—and even when they did the right thing, they did it for wrong reasons.

**Read again what Jesus said about the scribes and Pharisees. How can we make sure that we don’t become guilty of similar attitudes?**

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## Human Commandments

Although the scribes and Pharisees “sat in Moses’ seat,” their source of authority for religious instruction extended beyond the Old Testament. The law that the Pharisees utilized consisted of biblical interpretations of leading rabbis. These interpretations were not intended to replace the Scriptures but to complement them. At first they circulated orally; later the scribes began to assemble them into books.

The first official publication of rabbinic law did not appear until the end of the second century A.D., when Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi (Judah the Prince) published the *Mishnah*. The laws recorded in the Mishnah reflect about four centuries of rabbinic interpretation. Included among the contributing rabbis are many who lived at the time of Jesus, the most notable being Hillel and Shammai. There was also Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel and also Paul’s teacher.

**Read** Matthew 15:1–6. What is the controversial issue here? What error is Jesus seeking to correct?

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In lesson 1, we learned that the rabbinic laws were called *halakah*, which means “to walk.” The rabbis felt that if a person would walk in the ways of the minor laws, they would keep the major ones by default. However, somewhere along the way the minor laws began to take on major status, and after a while it was difficult to distinguish the traditional from the biblical.

It does not appear that Jesus had a problem with the Pharisees having their own rules. However, He did have a problem with the elevation of these rules to the status of “doctrine.” No human has the authority to create religious restrictions and elevate them to the level of divine mandate. But this is not to say that groups of believers are prohibited from creating regulations that help to govern community behavior. Practical instruction could help people greatly in keeping the law. However, the instruction should never be allowed to take the place of the law itself.

**As Seventh-day Adventists, what rules, traditions, and customs do we have that we believe help us to live more faithfully and obediently to the law? Write them down and bring them to class on Sabbath, asking questions about the role that they play in the life of your faith community.**

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## Traditions of the Elders

As we saw, some of the rabbis paid so much attention to the rules and traditions created to assist in the keeping of the law of Moses that they failed to distinguish between the two. After a while, the words of the rabbis gained canonical status; people thought they were as binding as Scripture. In all probability, when the rabbis originally wrote their commentaries, they had no intention of adding to the pages of Scripture. However, their devoted disciples probably saw it as their duty to share these unique interpretations with the general populace.

**Read again Matthew 15:1, 2. The tradition is based on what text in the first five books of Moses? What is the significance of your answer? See also Mark 7:3, 4 and Matt. 15:11.**

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One is hard pressed to find a biblical text that commands, “Thou shalt wash thy hands before thou eatest.” However, this injunction would not have surprised the scribes and Pharisees as they confronted Jesus, for they made it clear that the disciples were not in violation of Mosaic law but the “tradition of the elders.” The intensity with which they asked the question makes it seem that, for the Pharisees, this was a serious religious violation.

Health professionals and parents would probably like to provide a hygienic or psychological rationale for the Pharisees’ apparent obsessive compulsion with hand washing. However, scholars believe that the issue was really about ceremonial uncleanness. Apparently, the Pharisees were concerned that as people went about their daily business they would touch items that had been defiled. Consequently, if they ate without washing, they would contaminate themselves ceremonially by touching the food.

Given the fact that they levied their charge against Jesus’ disciples, we might conclude that Jesus Himself was not in violation of the well-known tradition (*Mark 7:3*). Nonetheless, He was well aware that the Pharisees were majoring in minors.

**Read Isaiah 29:13. What crucial biblical principles are revealed here? Why are they so important for us to remember?**

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## The Precepts of Men

“The substitution of the precepts of men for the commandments of God has not ceased. Even among Christians are found institutions and usages that have no better foundation than the traditions of the fathers. Such institutions, resting upon mere human authority, have supplanted those of divine appointment. Men cling to their traditions, and revere their customs, and cherish hatred against those who seek to show them their error. . . . In place of the authority of the so-called fathers of the church, God bids us accept the word of the eternal Father, the Lord of heaven and earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 398.

**Read** Matthew 15:3–6 but in the context of Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16, Matthew 19:19, and Ephesians 6:2. What two serious charges does Jesus make against the Pharisees?

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When the Pharisees confronted Jesus about the hand-washing incident, they expected Him to respond directly to their charge. However, in His unique style, Jesus confronted them with a question that got to the real heart of the issue. Jesus wanted them to know that the problem was not about hand washing or tithing but about the elevation of human standards over divine standards. The Pharisees could provide a logical explanation for their stance on hand washing. Undoubtedly, they probably also reasoned that their channeling of resources to the cause of God rather than to their parents was an expression of their unparalleled love for God.

Although the Pharisees may have had logical motives for their actions, God does not expect humans to love Him on their own terms. It was good that they were concerned about discipline and holy living, but that concern should never eclipse the will of God. The Pharisees should have recalled that the 613 laws recorded in the law of Moses were harmonious and not contradictory. None of the laws sought to supplant another. However, their insistence in following the “tradition of the elders” invalidated the Word of God (*Matt. 15:6*), at least as far as they themselves were concerned. No doubt, seeing themselves as the protectors of the law, they must have been shocked, even scandalized, by the claim that they were actually violating it, even making it of “none effect” by the very traditions that they thought were helping people to keep the law better!

## Excessive Righteousness *(Matt. 5:20)*

**Read** Matthew 5:17–20. In the context of this week’s lesson, what are some of the ways that Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 5:20 could be understood? See also Rom. 10:3.

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If read in isolation, Matthew 5:20 could be seen as an invitation to out-Pharisee the Pharisees; that is, do what they do, only do it more.

But is this what Jesus is saying? Fortunately, the answer to that question is within our reach. Yesterday’s lesson pointed out that it was not unusual for the scribes and Pharisees to elevate traditional laws over the law of God. Jesus had to tell them that their actions in effect invalidated the plain Word of God. Sunday’s study also mentioned that, although the scribes and Pharisees probably had good content in their teaching, many of them lived hypocritical lives.

Given this background, it is not hard to see the true sentiment behind Jesus’ statement. He very well could have been referring to that which He had elsewhere warned about: “ ‘Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven’ ” (*Matt. 5:19, NIV*). The Pharisees were so focused on the laws of human origin that they blatantly broke the law of God. Their righteousness was based on their own efforts and, as such, was defective. Isaiah had long declared that human righteousness is nothing but filthy rags (*Isa. 64:6*).

The kind of righteousness that Jesus promotes is one that starts in the heart. In the hand-washing incident, Jesus pointed to the Pharisees’ error by quoting from Isaiah 29:13: “ ‘These people . . . honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me’ ” (*NIV*). The righteousness that God seeks goes deeper than visible action.

Jesus calls for a righteousness that exceeds what the Pharisees themselves thought that they possessed. The righteousness that counts is not obtained by checking off every item on a task list; it can be gained only by faith in Jesus Christ and by claiming His righteousness for ourselves. It is a righteousness that comes from a complete surrender of self and a passionate realization that we need Jesus as our Substitute and Example.

**Read Romans 10:3. How does this text help us to see what true righteousness is all about?**

**Further Study:** For more information on this week’s topic, read Ellen G. White, “Tradition,” pp. 395–398; “Woes on the Pharisees,” pp. 610–620, in *The Desire of Ages*. Also read Matthew 23.

“Let all who accept human authority, the customs of the church, or the traditions of the fathers, take heed to the warning conveyed in the words of Christ, ‘In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 398.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the traditions that we as Seventh-day Adventists follow? Why is it important to recognize them as such? Why are traditions important, and what role do they have in the life of our community? Which ones have universal significance, and which ones are based on local and cultural factors?
- 2 “Believers have not infrequently allowed the enemy to work through them at the very time when they should have been wholly consecrated to God and to the advancement of His work. Unconsciously they have wandered far from the way of righteousness. Cherishing a spirit of criticism and faultfinding, of pharisaical piety and pride, they have grieved away the Spirit of God and have greatly retarded the work of God’s messengers.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 125. How does one “unconsciously” wander far from the way of righteousness? What steps can a person take to avoid getting trapped in a self-righteous rut?
- 3 Reflect on the order of the divine worship service in your church. Why does your church have that particular order? What is the meaning of each item in the service (for example, invocation, doxology, pastoral prayer, and so on)? What lessons can you learn from the church service that help to reveal just how much tradition is interwoven in our faith? At the same time we need to ask: just because it’s tradition, and nothing else, is it bad?

## Making a Difference

When I was a child, my family lived near the Seventh-day Adventist church in our town in northern Namibia. Mother took us to church, though we weren't Adventists. I liked church. On Sabbath afternoon, we'd go to Himba villages to sing and talk to them about God. Then when I was eight years old, we moved away, and I couldn't go to church anymore.

As I grew up, I began bullying other kids at school. I knew it was wrong, but I enjoyed the power. My parents kept me busy selling things in the market so I would stay out of trouble. One Saturday, I slipped away from work to play soccer. I saw the Adventist church near the field and watched the children walking to church. They were dressed nicely and seemed so happy. I wished I could be more like those children.

I left the soccer field and walked to the church. I recognized a few of the kids who went to my school. I expected these kids to treat me badly, but they didn't. They welcomed me into their group. When church started, they invited me to join them. I was embarrassed. My clothes were old, and I didn't have shoes. But no one cared.

During church one of the leaders announced that the new Pathfinder Club needed more members. I didn't know what Pathfinders was, but it sounded like fun, so I asked to join. The leader invited me to the meeting that same afternoon.

I told my mother that I had attended church and wanted to go back. She nodded. In time I took my younger sisters with me. Then I invited my cousin. She started attending Pathfinders and eventually came to church.

I gave my life to God. Mother sees how God is changing me, and she's glad. Others have noticed too. I no longer bully people. God has shown me how the kids I had bullied felt when I treated them badly. Now I try to be kind to others and encourage other kids.

God has given me a great job! I help record and edit Bible stories for the Himba people, most of whom can't read. I'm happy that God is letting me make a difference in other people's lives. My mother is Himba, and I want to help teach the Himba that Jesus loves them and wants them to live with Him forever.

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping us to record more stories to reach the Himba in a way they can understand and respond to. Thank you!



*WILLEM HIFIKEPUNYE is a student serving God in Opuwo in northern Namibia.*

# Christ *and the Law in the Sermon on the Mount*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 5:17–20, Luke 16:16, Matt. 5:21–32, Rom. 7:24, Matt. 5:33–37, 5:38–48.*

**Memory Text:** “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot, or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (*Matthew 5:17, 18, NKJV*).

When most people think about the Sermon on the Mount, they automatically think of “the Beatitudes” (*Matt. 5:1–12*). However, the Sermon on the Mount actually covers three chapters that have been divided into four sections. The Beatitudes comprise only the first section. In the second, Jesus compares Christians to light and salt (*Matt. 5:13–16*). The third, *Matthew 5:17–48*, is where Jesus gives us a new and deeper perspective on the law. And then there is the final and longest section, *Matthew 6:1–7:23*, in which Jesus provides clear teaching on Christian behavior. The whole talk ends with the parable of the wise and foolish builders (*Matt. 7:24–27*), which stresses the importance of obedience to what God calls us to do.

This week we will investigate the third section, *Matthew 5:17–48* (which theologians call the *antitheses*, cases in which sharp contrasts are presented), to see what it teaches us about the law.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 26.

## “One Jot or Tittle”

**Read** again Matthew 5:17–20. How interesting that Jesus would greatly emphasize the law here, while at the same time making the statement that He did about the scribes and Pharisees, who so greatly emphasized the law, as well. What important lesson does this passage teach about true obedience to the law?

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Jesus begins this section with the assurance that He has not come to abolish “the Law or the Prophets” (*Matt. 5:17, NKJV*). Although there is no reference to it, many see this as a formulaic expression for the entire Old Testament (*see also Matt. 7:12, 11:13, 22:40, Luke 16:16, Acts 13:15, 24:14, Rom. 3:21*). In spite of what His opponents claimed, Jesus did not attack the very book that revealed the will of His Father. Instead, His purpose was to “fulfill” the law and the prophets, not to do away with them.

The word used for “fulfill” (*plero*) literally means to “fill up,” or “complete.” It carries the sense of “filling to the brim.” There are two ways to understand *fulfill*. One is to place the emphasis on Jesus as being the fulfillment of Scripture (*for example, Luke 24:25–27, John 5:39*). However, key to understanding this text is the immediate context, which shows that Jesus did not come to destroy Scripture but to reveal its inner essence.

Having established His overall intent, Jesus switched emphasis from the Old Testament in general to the law in particular. Almost as if He knew that people would one day accuse Him of abolishing the law, He cautions that as long as heaven and earth remain, the law will exist until everything “is accomplished” (*Matt. 5:18, NIV*). With this statement, Jesus confirms the perpetuity of the law.

In fact, the law is so important that all those who violate its precepts will be called “the least in the kingdom.” This is just a way of saying that they are wrong in what they are doing. Jesus is quick to point out that He is not promoting the empty righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees but instead a righteousness springing from a heart that loves God and seeks to do His will.

## Murder (Matt. 5:21–26)

After He clarified His intention to uphold the law, Jesus started to explain a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. He begins by citing the sixth commandment (*Exod. 20:13*) and summarizing, from the law of Moses, the penalty for violation (*Exod. 21:12, Lev. 24:17*).

The sixth commandment does not include all cases in which one person kills another. In cases of manslaughter, a person could flee to a city of refuge and gain temporary asylum (*Exod. 21:13, Num. 35:12*). However, one who intentionally took another’s life would receive swift judgment. In His explanation, Jesus does not focus on the act itself but on the motive and intents of the one who commits the act. One might take a life accidentally, but the person who purposes to take a life has gone through a period of deliberation. The sin took place before the person even carried out the terrible deed. Many potential murderers are stopped only by a lack of opportunity.

**Read Matthew 5:22. What does Jesus equate to murder? How does 1 John 3:15 help to emphasize the point? What is the real issue here that Jesus is pointing to, and what does this tell us about the real reach of God’s law?**

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Though the Bible often talks about the power of words, Jesus here takes it to a deeper level. Often, the sole purpose of harsh words or cursing is to evoke negative feelings in the victim. Jesus’ point is crystal clear. It’s not just those who carry through with the crime who are guilty of murder but also those who speak harsh words to others or who even harbor murderous thoughts. Jesus counsels those harboring these thoughts to reconcile with their victims before coming to the altar (*Matt. 5:23–26*).

**Dwell on the implication of Jesus’ words in the texts for today. How well have you done in this regard? What does such a high standard tell you about the need to be covered by Christ’s righteousness at all times?**

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## Adultery (Matt. 5:27–32)

Jesus' next example involves commandments concerning adultery. He first cites the seventh commandment, *You shall not commit adultery*. In the context of the law of Moses, adultery took place when a married person was sexually involved with someone other than a spouse. The law was very clear that both parties found guilty of adultery should be put to death. As with the sixth commandment, Jesus gave the deeper implications of this particular commandment.

Adultery often starts long before the acts are committed. In the same way that murder starts with the intention to inflict permanent harm on an individual, adultery begins at the very moment when an individual lustfully desires another person, married or single, to whom he or she is not married.

**Read** Matthew 5:29, 30. How much more forceful could Jesus be in describing the danger of sin? After looking at these texts, read Romans 7:24. What important truths are found here?

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Here, too, Jesus provides an instant remedy for those sins that have been exposed. The solution is not to follow through with the sin but to have a conversion of the heart. With strong metaphors, Jesus counsels the one who has the problem to do what is necessary if he or she wishes to enter the kingdom. This may mean taking a different route to work or terminating a cherished friendship, but eternal gain far outweighs the passions of the moment.

As we saw before, Moses permitted divorce even though he knew it was not a part of God's original plan. After addressing married men with roaming eyes and admonishing them to control their impulses, Jesus encourages lifelong marriage fidelity.

**“The surrender of the will is represented as plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand. Often it seems to us that to surrender the will to God is to consent to go through life maimed or crippled. But it is better, says Christ, for self to be maimed, wounded, crippled, if thus you may enter into life. That which you look upon as disaster is the door to highest benefit.”**—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 61. **What implication might these words have for you?**



## Promises, Promises . . . (*Matt. 5:33–37*)

The first two antitheses (murder and adultery) are based on the Decalogue. The antithesis regarding divorce and the ones that follow are taken from other sections of the Mosaic law, including the one about swearing falsely and performing oaths to the Lord.

**Read** *Leviticus 19:11–13*. What specific points do we find here? See also *Exod. 20:7*.

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The Mosaic law, from which Jesus quotes, is listed in a section of *Leviticus* that condemns a number of deceptive practices. Here again it is evident that Jesus' concern is with the *intentions*. Anyone who makes a promise with no intention of fulfilling it has made a conscious decision to sin.

Though the command against swearing falsely relates to promises made to other people, the second command concerns promises made to God.

**Read** *Deuteronomy 23:21–23*. In what way do these verses relate to Jesus' words in *Matthew 5:33–37*? See also *Acts 5:1–11*.

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Unlike the person guilty of false swearing, the one who makes a financial pledge to God is not necessarily intending to defraud. However, Jesus knows human nature and cautions against making promises that one may later regret. Rather than making promises that may not even be in the power of the individual to fulfill, a Christian should be a person of integrity whose "yes" means "yes" and "no" means "no."

**Think about a time that you made a promise (either to a person or to God) that you intended to keep but ultimately didn't. How can you learn to be careful about this problem? What about promises to yourself that you have reneged on?**

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## *Lex Talionis* (Matt. 5:38–48)

It appears that the common theme here (Matt. 5:38–48) is revenge. This theme concerns the many commandments in the Mosaic law that are built on the principle of repaying a crime with an equal punishment, an idea called *lex talionis*, a Latin term meaning “law of retaliation.”

As we see in a number of passages (Exod. 21:22–25, Lev. 24:17–21, Deut. 19:21), the law called for the offender to suffer the same experience as the victim. If the victim lost an eye, arm, foot, or life, the offender must also. This “law of retaliation” was common among a number of ancient civilizations. Why not, since it seems to reveal a simple principle of justice?

It’s important to realize that this principle is there to *limit* retaliation; that is, to keep people from extracting more from a wrong done to them than they are rightfully entitled to extract. Thus, in many ways, this law was to ensure that justice was not perverted.

Therefore, in Matthew 5:38–42 Jesus was not necessarily attacking the legitimacy of a law that demanded a person to be punished for a crime. Instead, Jesus focused on the Christians’ response to people who try to take advantage of them. Rather than seeking opportunities for revenge, Christians should “retaliate” with kindness, something that we can do only through the grace of God working within us. In this appeal, Jesus has taken us to a deeper level in our understanding of what it means to be a follower of the Lord.

The final antithesis addresses the attitude that promotes love for friends and hatred for enemies. The command to love your neighbor is found in Leviticus 19:18. There is no explicit text that calls for hatred of enemies, even despite Deuteronomy 23:3–6.

In the context of Jesus’ world, the Jews were under foreign occupation by the Roman oppressive power and were second-class citizens in their own land. Given their oppression, they probably felt justified in hating their enemy, who at times severely oppressed them. Jesus was showing them a better way to live, even under less-than-ideal circumstances.

**Read Matthew 5:44, 45. What is Jesus saying to us here? More important, in what way can you apply this teaching in your own life with someone who has done you wrong?**

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**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Jesus takes up the commandments separately, and explains the depth and breadth of their requirement. Instead of removing one jot of their force, He shows how far reaching their principles are, and exposes the fatal mistake of the Jews in their outward show of obedience. He declares that by the evil thought or the lustful look the law of God is transgressed. One who becomes a party to the least injustice is breaking the law and degrading his own moral nature. Murder first exists in the mind. He who gives hatred a place in his heart is setting his feet in the path of the murderer, and his offerings are abhorrent to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

Love is the binding principle in God’s law. In each of the antitheses, Jesus elevates the principle of love: love keeps a person from harboring hatred toward her sister; love keeps a husband and wife together; love challenges the Christian to be always honest in his dealings with others and God; love allows a person to react in kindness when he has been wronged; and love empowers the individual to treat the enemy as he himself would like to be treated.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In this week’s section, Jesus said, “You have heard it has been said by them of old,” and then later said, “but I say unto you,” and then gave the antitheses. Notice that some of the sayings “of old” were direct quotes from the Bible or taken from Old Testament teachings. Thus, the problem was not with the references but with how they had been interpreted. What lesson can we take from this regarding, if not our doctrines, the way in which we interpret them? How might we be in danger of looking at things too superficially and missing the deeper meaning?
- 2 Many fall into the trap of interpreting texts in isolation from other texts. One such text is Matthew 5:48, where we are told to be as perfect as our Father in heaven. How does the interpretation of this text in its immediate context (*Matt. 5:43–48*) demonstrate the importance of careful Bible study? How would you respond to a person who claimed that this text was teaching sinlessness? What is the text really teaching, and why does this teaching reveal the true meaning of being a follower of Jesus?
- 3 How do the texts we studied, particularly about murder and adultery, help to show how wrong those are who claim the law was abolished after the Cross?

## Patricia's Prayer

Patricia lives in central Cameroon. She's a lot like other girls. She likes to jump rope and talk with her friends. But in some ways Patricia is different from other children. She has HIV and often feels sick. Two years ago, Patricia's mother died of AIDS, and Patricia and her sister went to live with their grandmother. Her father couldn't pay the girls' tuition at the Seventh-day Adventist school they had been attending, so he sent them to the public school near their home.

But the children in the public school shunned Patricia because of her illness. The girl begged her father to let her return to the Adventist school. "The teachers and children in the Adventist school don't tease me," she said. "They pray for me. They help me if I don't feel well or need help. Please, please, let me go to the Adventist school."

Finally, Patricia's father allowed her to return to the Adventist school. "I love my school," she says. "When I'm feeling well, I'm just one of the children in my class. And when I'm not well, the teachers and the children help me."

Patricia's father can't always pay her tuition. So Patricia prays that God will make a way for her to remain in school.

Patricia enjoys attending Sabbath School, too. She likes the Bible stories the most. "My favorite story is about Moses," she says. "When he was born he was hidden in a basket and found by the pharaoh's daughter. God saved him from death because his mother prayed for him.

"God loved Moses very much," Patricia says with a smile. "He gave Moses a special work to do. I know that God loves me, and He has something special for me to do, too. God can use me to help people come to Jesus. I don't know how He will do that, but I know He will."

Patricia wants others to know that even if they have problems in life—whether they are poor or sick or have no money—God is with them and will help them. "Trust God and worship Him," she says. "Whatever you do, do it for Jesus. That way others will know that Jesus lives in your heart."

Patricia knows that God didn't make her sick, but He can use her sickness to help other people learn about His love. She learned that at the little Adventist school in a village in Cameroon.

Our mission offerings help to build schools such as the one Patricia attends. Thank you for being a part of something larger than any of us, God's work around the world.



# Christ *and the* Sabbath




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:1–3, Heb. 1:1–3, Acts 13:14, Mark 2:23–28, John 5:1–9, Isa. 65:17.*

**Memory Text:** “‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

**T**he vast majority of Christian denominations observe Sunday as the day of “rest” and worship (even though the vast majority of Sunday keepers don’t really rest on Sunday). Sunday “keeping” is so prevalent among modern Christians that many believe the day to be the “Christian Sabbath.”

This was not always the case. On the contrary, as a continuation of the Israelite faith, Christianity did not discard all of the symbols of its parent religion, including the seventh-day Sabbath. For a time, the only Bible that early Christians had to guide them was the Old Testament. No wonder, then, that the issue of an alternative day of worship was not introduced into Christianity until more than a century after Christ ascended to heaven. Furthermore, it was not until the fourth century, with the edict of Constantine, that Sunday observance became the policy of the dominant church. Unfortunately, even after the Protestant Reformation, almost all Christianity has adhered to keeping Sunday, despite the Bible teaching that the seventh day remains the true Sabbath.

This week’s lesson will cover Christ and the Sabbath.

\* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 3.*

## The Jewish Sabbath? *(Exod. 20:8–11)*

Although many refer to the seventh day as the “Jewish Sabbath,” the Bible reveals that the Sabbath predates the Jews by many centuries. Its roots go back to the Creation itself.

Genesis 2:1–3 declares that after God had completed His acts of creation in six days, He rested on the seventh day and then “blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (*NIV*). This clearly shows the high place of the Sabbath in God’s creation. In addition to the blessing, the Sabbath was also “made holy.” In other words, God applied some of His own qualities to this monument in time.

**Compare** the two Sabbath commandments in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. In what ways do these relate to the theory that the Sabbath is not only for Jews?

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The most notable difference between the two commandments is the rationale for Sabbath observance. Exodus makes a direct reference to Genesis 2:3 as it elevates the fact that God both “blessed” and “made holy” the Sabbath day. On the other hand, Deuteronomy 5:15 points to Israel’s divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage as being a rationale for Sabbath keeping. On the basis of the Deuteronomy text, many believe the Sabbath is only for the Jews. However, this argument totally ignores the fact that the Exodus text points to the Creation, when God established Sabbath for all humanity.

Furthermore, the Deuteronomy 5:15 reference to deliverance from Egypt is symbolic of the salvation we have in Christ. Hence, the Sabbath is a symbol not only of Creation but also of Redemption, two themes that are linked with each other in the Bible (*Heb. 1:1–3, Col. 1:13–20, John 1:1–14*). Only by the fact that Jesus is our Creator could He also be our Redeemer, and the seventh-day Sabbath is a symbol of His work as both.

**Anyone can claim to be resting in Christ. In your own experience, how does keeping the seventh-day Sabbath help you to find that rest?**

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## A Time for Rest and Worship *(Luke 4:16)*

According to Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2, the preincarnate Christ was directly involved in the creation process. These texts declare that all created things came into existence through Him. Paul further expresses that Christ had a part in creating “invisible” things (*Col. 1:16, 17*), which would, of course, include the Sabbath. Although Christ was central in the creative process, when He was transformed into human flesh, He subjected Himself to His Father’s commandments (*John 15:10*). As earlier lessons showed, Jesus was opposed to certain traditions and used every opportunity to correct religious behavior that was not grounded in the will of God. If Jesus had intended to abolish the Sabbath commandment, He had plenty of opportunities to do just that.

Most of the Sabbath texts in the Old Testament speak of the Sabbath as a day of rest. The understanding of “rest” in many modern languages may lead some to believe that the Sabbath should be spent sleeping and generally relaxing. While we can definitely enjoy these activities on the Sabbath, the true meaning of *rest* is “cessation,” “stop,” or “pause.” The Sabbath is a time when we can take a break from the routine labor of the first six days and spend special time with the Creator.

By the time of Christ, the Jews were holding a weekly divine worship service on the Sabbath (*see Luke 4:16*). Those who lived in Jerusalem would attend special prayer services in the temple, where the liturgy was different from what it was on the other days of the week. Jews who lived in other parts of the world developed the synagogue as a place of social gathering and worship. On Sabbaths, as long as a minimum of ten males was present (a *minyan*), a divine worship service could take place.

**What** do the following texts inform us about Sabbath keeping among the earliest Christians? What does this tell us about those who claim the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in honor of the resurrection? *Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; Heb. 4:9.*

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Given their Jewish roots, it was only natural for early Christians to worship on the day prescribed in the Old Testament. Yet, almost twenty years after the ascension of Jesus, it was still Paul’s “custom” to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath (*Acts 17:2*). Thus, no biblical evidence shows that the first Christians kept Sunday instead of Sabbath.

## A Time for Enjoyment *(Mark 2:27, 28)*

Many who claim to keep the Sabbath do not always understand what Sabbath keeping entails. As did some of the Pharisees in Jesus' time, people even today have imprisoned the Sabbath behind rigid walls of rules and regulations (while others have almost made it a day no different than any other). The Sabbath is supposed to be a delight, not a burden, but it is still a day to be kept holy.

During the time when Jesus walked this earth, some of the religious leaders had surrounded the Sabbath with 39 other commandments. They reasoned that if people could keep the 39 laws, then the Sabbath would be perfectly kept. As a result of this well-intentioned law-making, the Sabbath—which was intended to be a joy—did, indeed, become a yoke to many.

**Carefully** read Mark 2:23–28. Why did the disciples pluck grain? Does the text indicate that Jesus participated with the disciples? What biblical laws were being violated, if any?

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As Jesus and His hungry disciples walked through a field one Sabbath, the disciples decided to satisfy their hunger by plucking grain. Although it was not their field, their actions were permissible under the law of Moses (*see Deut. 23:25*), even if the Pharisees interpreted it as a violation of another Mosaic law that forbade plowing and harvesting on the Sabbath (*see Exod. 34:21*). Apparently, Jesus did not partake of the grain; nonetheless, He took the time to defend the disciples' actions. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that even David and his men had eaten the “forbidden” sanctuary bread when hungry.

In Mark 2:27, 28, Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humans, not vice versa. In other words, the Sabbath was not made *to be* worshiped, but rather to provide opportunities *for* worship. As God's gift to *all* humans, the Sabbath is not meant to oppress but to provide release and liberation. It is truly a way to experience our rest and freedom in Christ.

**What are some things that you can do on the Sabbath that you can't so easily do other days of the week? Think through this question, and bring your answers to class on Sabbath.**

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## A Time for Healing *(Luke 13:16)*

When God created the world, He pronounced that everything was “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*), no doubt perfect in every way. However, with the advent of sin, the creation has been corrupted with evil, an impact seen everywhere. Humans, though created in the image of God, became subject to sickness, deterioration, and death. We often say that death is part of life; death, though, is the negation of life, not part of it. Death was never meant to be something that we experience.

Given God’s original plan for humanity, it is no surprise that some of Jesus’ most dramatic healing miracles took place on the Sabbath.

**Review** the Sabbath-healing stories in **Mark 3:1–6, Luke 13:10–17, John 5:1–9, 9:1–14**. What lessons do these miracles teach about the true purpose of the Sabbath?

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Each of the Sabbath-healing miracles is spectacular and serves to demonstrate the true meaning of Sabbath. Before Jesus healed the man with the withered hand (*Mark 3:1–6*), He asked the rhetorical question, “‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’” (*Mark 3:4, NKJV*). If a person has an opportunity to relieve suffering on the day of liberation, why shouldn’t he do it? In fact, the miracle with the woman who had a bent back powerfully demonstrates the liberating purpose of the Sabbath (*Luke 13:10–17*). When criticized for the healing, Jesus asked, “‘Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’” (*Luke 13:16, NIV*).

The theme of liberation is also present in the accounts of the healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda, who had been sick for thirty-eight years (*John 5:1–9*), and the healing of the man born blind (*John 9:1–14*). In response to the Pharisees’ charge that Jesus broke the Sabbath with His healing miracles, He reminded them, “‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working’” (*John 5:17, NIV*). If God did not allow the healing, it would not have happened. When it comes to relieving human misery, God does not rest.

**What should we learn from the mistakes of these religious leaders about how preconceived notions can so blind us to even the most obvious of truths?**

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## A New Creation

Sabbath not only reminds us of God’s creative ability, but it points to His restorative promises. Indeed, with every healing of a person on the Sabbath, the promise of eternal restoration was powerfully reinforced. In its own unique way, the Sabbath provides a view that reaches back to earth’s earliest history and stretches forward to humanity’s eventual destiny. Again, we can say that the Sabbath points both to Creation and to Redemption.

God created this world once already. Due to sin, however, His creation has been defiled, but this defiling will not last forever. A key element of the plan of salvation is restoration—not just of the earth but, even more important, of people, beings made in His image who will be restored to that image and who will live on the new earth. The same God who made the first earth, whose work we celebrate every seventh day, will create the earth again. (Think about how important remembering our creation must be that we are commanded to do it once a week in a special way.)

**Read** the following texts. What message does each one have that can be linked to the meaning of the Sabbath?

*Isa. 65:17* \_\_\_\_\_

*Isa. 66:22* \_\_\_\_\_

*2Pet. 3:9–13* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 21:1* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Cor. 5:17* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gal. 6:15* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 21:5* \_\_\_\_\_

The Sabbath “declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. . . . The Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 288, 289.

**What practical things can you do to allow the power of God to sanctify you? That is, what choices do you make on a daily basis that either help or hinder this creative process in you?**

**Further Study:** “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends ‘in one point,’ manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes ‘guilty of all.’ James 2:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study, a fuller rendition of the reference used in the introduction to this quarter. How does the Sabbath and what has happened to the Sabbath in Christendom help us to understand Satan’s attack on the law of God?
- 2 In the following texts (*Mark 3:2, Luke 13:14, John 5:18, 9:16*) Jesus is charged with breaking the Sabbath. Review Exodus 20:8–11 and evaluate the merit of this charge. What do you say to those who claim that these passages provide evidence that Jesus broke the Sabbath?
- 3 In class go over your answer to the final question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. That is, what are some things that the Sabbath frees you up to do that on other days of the week you might not be able to do because of worldly obligations?
- 4 Review your own Sabbath experience. Is the Sabbath for you a day of liberation, rest, and freedom or a day of foreboding, bondage, and stress? How can you learn to enjoy the Sabbath, to make it a delight, as we are told to do in this verse: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words” (*Isa. 58:13*)?

## Sharing the News

I've done a lot of things I'm not proud of. Although my mother didn't attend any particular church, she prayed for me. And because of her prayers, God took hold of my life. I was in the army when I first felt God's presence leading me. I began visiting churches, from large, influential ones to some pretty strange ones.

One day as I walked down the street in the capital city of Bulgaria, I saw a sign for a church I had never heard of. I felt the Lord pointing me to it, so I stepped inside and sat down to listen to the pastor's sermon. It was a Seventh-day Adventist church. The members' warm welcome touched my heart. After the service, I went searching for a Bible.

I attended the Adventist church occasionally, but I still drank and visited discos. One day while drunk, I broke into a car and was arrested. I realized that drinking would lead me to prison—or worse—so I quit.

I asked the Adventist pastor to study the Bible with me, and a year later I was baptized.

One day two members of the church invited me to visit a man they knew. I learned that this man, Simon, was a former leader in the Mafia. He was an alcoholic and was paralyzed. The men introduced me as a friend of theirs and a former alcoholic. Simon perked up and started asking me pointed questions such as how God led me to Himself and the Adventist Church and how He saved me from alcoholism. Before I left, I gave him a couple of small books to read.

Two weeks later, I visited Simon again, this time alone. Simon had read the two books I had given him and had started reading the Bible. He asked me question after question and wouldn't let me go. I suggested that we study the Bible together.

It wasn't logical, but I started with Daniel 2. I learned that Simon knew a lot about world history and the countries of the prophecies included in Daniel. He was excited by the study and later told me that he had studied my notes and his history books until two-thirty in the morning. "And it all fits!" he said, amazed.

Simon stopped drinking and smoking and is recovering from his paralysis. Now he no longer needs his wheelchair. He has given his life to Jesus and is looking forward to baptism.

I thank God for my mother's prayers and for God, who saw potential in an alcoholic whose life was going nowhere. And thank you for giving to mission so that others in this world can know that our wonderful Savior loves them.



KAMEN PAVLOV *shares his faith in western Bulgaria.*

# Christ's Death *and the Law*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 7:1–6; 8:5–8; Rom. 7:7–13; Rom. 4:15; Acts 13:38, 39; Gal. 3:10.*

**Memory Text:** “In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God” (*Romans 7:4, NRSV*).

A woman is driving way over the speed limit. Suddenly, she sees in her rearview mirror the flashing red and blue lights of a police car and hears the familiar wail of the siren. She pulls over, grabs her purse, and takes out her driver's license. The police officer approaches, takes her license, and returns to his car.

She wonders how much the ticket is going to be (she was way over the limit); she also worries about how she will be able to pay it. A few minutes later the police officer comes back and says, “OK, miss, what we are going to do, so that you don't have to face the penalty of the law again, is abolish the law. You no longer have to worry about the speed limit.”

As ludicrous as that story is, it's no more so than the theology that teaches that after Jesus died, the law, the Ten Commandments, was abolished.

This week we'll look at the death of Jesus and what it means in relation to the law.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 10.

## Dead to the Law *(Rom. 7:1–6)*

**Carefully** examine Romans 7:1–6 and summarize as well as you can what Paul is saying. Read it carefully, keeping in mind other Bible passages about the law.

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Although some Bible versions incorrectly translate verse one to read that the law is binding until death, a literal interpretation is: “every living person is under the rule of law.” The emphasis is not on the dead but on the living.

The example from marriage demonstrates that any married person who has an intimate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse has broken the law and is guilty of adultery. Only if his or her spouse dies can he or she enter a relationship with another person without violating the law.

Also, some argue that this passage shows the death of the law; however, it really shows a person’s death to the law through the body of Christ (*Rom. 7:4*). According to Romans 6:6, the part of the person that dies is “the old self.” When united to the old self, the person is condemned by the law and thus trapped in a miserable relationship (*Rom. 7:9–11, 24*). After the old self dies, the person is free to enter into a relationship with another—the resurrected Christ (*Rom. 7:4*).

What Paul is saying is that because law binds every living person, God’s law must also govern the new union. However, the fact that the believer is now married to Christ means that the law is no longer an instrument of condemnation; the believer in Jesus is free from the condemnation of the law because he or she is covered in the righteousness of Jesus.

Paul is not stating that the Ten Commandments, which define sin, are now abolished; that would be contrary to so much of the Bible, his own writings included. Instead, he is talking about a new relationship one has to the law through faith in Jesus. The law still is binding; it’s just that for the believer in Jesus, the one who died to self and to sin, the law no longer holds him or her in the grip of condemnation because the person now “belongs to another,” Jesus.

## The Law of Sin and Death (*Rom. 8:1–8*)

Paul assures the Christian that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (*Rom. 8:1, 2, NKJV*). If we read these verses apart from their immediate context, it would appear that Paul was referring to two opposing laws: the law of life and the law of sin and death. However, the difference is not with the law but with the individual before and after he or she receives Christ.

**In** what ways does Paul’s discussion in Romans 7:7–13 illustrate the role of the law?

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The function of the law depends on the person with whom it is associated. The same knife, for instance, can be used by a surgeon to heal or by a murderer to kill. In the same way, a thief who breaks a law to steal someone’s purse will stand in a different relationship to the law than will the one whom the law was meant to protect (the owner of the purse). The law itself is described as “holy and righteous and good” (*Rom. 7:12, NASB*), or as the “law of sin and of death” (*Rom. 8:2, NASB*). However, in the same way that God’s retributive vengeance does not stop Him from being a God of love, the law’s function as an agent of sin and death does not make it sinful.

According to Romans 8:5–8, the law is an instrument of “sin and death” for those who “set their minds on the things of the flesh” (*Rom. 8:5, NASB*). This describes the person who is still married to the “old self” and has no apparent desire to sever the relationship and be joined to the resurrected Christ. As a result of the sinful union, the person finds himself or herself “at enmity” with God and His law since they are on opposing sides (*Rom. 8:7*).

Paul then emphasizes that it is impossible for the “mind set on the flesh” to submit to God’s law, or even to please Him (*Rom. 8:7, 8, NASB*). This is obviously not a reference to the struggling individual of Romans 7:13–25, since that person serves the law of God “with my mind” (*Rom. 7:25, NASB*). Paul is probably referring to those who by their wickedness “suppress the truth” (*Rom. 1:18, NASB*). It is for these rebels against God’s sovereignty that the law becomes an instrument of sin and death (*Rom. 2:12*).

**How do you relate to the law when you violate it?**

## The Power of the Law

**According** to Romans 4:15, 5:13, and 7:7, what is the function of the law? Also, what does Romans 7:8–11 say about the effect that the law has on the person who violates it?

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Every instrument has its purpose. Just as a key is used for opening a lock or a knife is used for cutting, so the law is used to define sin. Had it not been for God’s law, there would be no absolute method of knowing what actions were acceptable or unacceptable to Him. And though sin cannot exist without the law, Paul makes it clear that the law is not a willing partner with sin: “Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure” (*Rom. 7:13, NRSV*).

**In** what ways do the above texts help to shed light on 1 Corinthians 15:54–58?

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If read in isolation, 1 Corinthians 15:54–58 would appear to promote a negative view of God’s law. Paul’s point, however, is that the law “empowers” sin only because it defines what sin is. And, of course, the “wages of sin is death” (*Rom. 6:23*). Had it not been for the law, there would be no death because it would be impossible to define sin. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s purpose is not to demonize the law but to demonstrate how, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, all who believe can experience victory over death, a death that comes because of violation of the law.

**When was the last time that someone sinned against you; that is, the last time that someone violated God’s law in a way that hurt you? How does such an experience help us to understand why the belief that states that God’s law was abolished after the Cross is so wrong?**

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## The Impotent Law

Though in one sense, as we saw, the law “empowers” sin, in another real way the law is terribly impotent. How can the same object be both powerful and impotent at the same time?

Here again, the difference lies not in the law but in the person. For the one who discovers that he is a sinner, the law forces him to acknowledge that he is going against God’s will and is consequently on a path to death. Upon discovering his sinfulness, the sinner may decide to follow the law to the letter. However, the fact that he has already sinned has made him a candidate for death.

**Read Acts 13:38, 39, Romans 8:3, and Galatians 3:21. What do they tell us about the law and salvation?**

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Some people believe that strict adherence to the law will grant salvation, but this is not a biblical teaching. The law defines sin (*Rom. 7:7*); it does not forgive it (*Gal. 2:21*). Hence, Paul remarks that the same law that empowers sin is also “weak” (*Rom. 8:3*). It is able to convict the sinner of sins but cannot make the sinner righteous. A mirror can show us our faults; it just can’t fix them. As Ellen G. White wrote: “The law cannot save those whom it condemns; it cannot rescue the perishing.”—*Signs of the Times*, November 10, 1890.

When we fully consider the purpose of the law, it is easier to understand why Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for the human race. The death of Jesus placed formerly sinful human beings in a right relationship with God and with His “holy and righteous and good” law (*Rom. 7:12, NASB*). At the same time, too, His death showed us the futility of salvation by keeping the law. After all, if obedience to the law could save us, Jesus would not have had to die in our place. The fact that He did reveals that obedience to the law could not save us. We needed something much more drastic.

**Though we are promised again and again the power to obey God’s law, why is this obedience not enough to secure our salvation? In one sense the answer shouldn’t be that difficult. Look at yourself and your law-keeping. If your salvation depended upon your obedience, how much hope would you have?**

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## The Curse of the Law (*Gal. 3:10–14*)

**What** do the following texts tell us about human nature? How do we see the reality of this truth every day? *Ps. 51:5, Isa. 64:6, and Rom. 3:23.*

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With the exception of Christ, all human beings have a common experience in that all have been infected by Adam’s sin. Consequently, no natural person can ever claim to be fully righteous. There are some, such as Elijah and Enoch, who lived exceptionally close to God, but no one has been able to live a completely blameless life. Indeed, it is with this reality in mind that Paul declares: “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law’ ” (*Gal. 3:10, NRSV*). The truth is, the law demands total and complete conformity, and who has ever always given that, except Jesus?

**How** does Romans 6:23 help to define what the “curse of the law” means? See also *Gen. 2:17 and Ezek. 18:4.*

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Everyone is naturally under the curse of the law. Because the law has no margin for error, it is impossible for a person to correct a past sin. Consequently, death is the individual’s fate. James paints an even bleaker picture by reminding us that transgression in one area of the law is just as bad as transgression in all areas (*James 2:10*). The wages of sin is death, and death has no proportions.

When we recognize the helpless condition of those under the curse, it is easier to appreciate the extent of God’s love: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). Through His death, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (*Gal. 3:13, NIV*).

**Think about what Paul said: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (*Gal. 3:10, RSV*). This is because the law can’t save us; thus, we are cursed with death. How can acknowledging this truth help us to better appreciate what we have been given in Jesus? In what ways do we manifest such appreciation in our lives? See *1 John 5:3.***

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**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “‘It Is Finished,’” pp. 758–764, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The law requires righteousness,—a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can ‘be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’ Rom. 3:26.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.

In summary, the death of Jesus powerfully demonstrated the permanence of God’s law. When our first parents sinned, God could have abolished His laws and taken away the penalties for violation. However, this would have meant a miserable existence in a lawless society for the earth’s inhabitants. Instead, God chose to send His Son as a Substitute for us, in that He received the just penalty for sin as required by the law on behalf of all people. Through Jesus’ death, the entire race stands in a new relationship to God. This means that any one of us, through faith in Jesus, can have our sins forgiven and stand perfect in God’s sight.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Many religions teach that at the end of a person’s life God balances the person’s good deeds against the bad deeds before determining whether that person will be rewarded in the afterlife. What is so terribly wrong with this kind of thinking?
- 2 Jesus, the One who was equal to God, died for our sins. If we think that obedience to the law can somehow add to that, in terms of saving us, what does this say about the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice?
- 3 What are some other reasons why the belief that states that God’s law was abolished after the Cross is false? When people say that, what do they really mean was abolished; that is, what commandment do they think was abolished?

## A New Life

Ten-year-old Moses stared out the airplane window at the large city below. This would be his new home. *What will it be like to live in the United States?* Moses wondered. *Will I make friends here? Will I even be able to talk to them?*

For as long as Moses could remember, his family had lived in one refugee camp after another in central Africa. His home had been a plastic tarp held up by sticks. When it rained, everything got wet, and there seldom was enough food to eat or clean water to drink.

One day Moses' father told the family, "Soon we will leave this camp for a new home in the United States."

The family arrived in their new home and settled into an apartment. On the first day of school Moses felt lost. He couldn't find his class and couldn't speak English to ask for help. Finally someone took him to his class.

Moses studied hard and soon could speak enough English to talk to his classmates. He began telling his new friends that Jesus loves them. Some listened, but others ignored him. His father and mother studied English so they could find work. Everything seemed so hard. They struggled to find a grocery store and a church. Riding the bus was difficult until they could speak the language. After months of studying and searching for work, Moses' father found a job.

Then one day Moses' father stumbled into the apartment, blood spattered on his face and clothes. "Some teenagers don't want us here," he said. "One of them hit me with a rock." His father lost eyesight in the injured eye. But he refused to be angry. "We can't be angry when someone hurts us. We must forgive them and pray for them." Moses knew that his father was right, but it was still hard to forgive the teens who had hurt his father.

The family has found a different place to live, and church members are helping to pay the children's tuition so they can study in the Seventh-day Adventist school.



Moses wants to be a pastor, as his grandfather in Africa was. He shares God's love with others and offers to study the Bible with them so they will learn to love God too. "God has been with my family through hard times," he says. "He will never leave us."

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to reach millions of refugees in North America with the message of God's love. Thank you for reaching out to the world by reaching the world in North America.

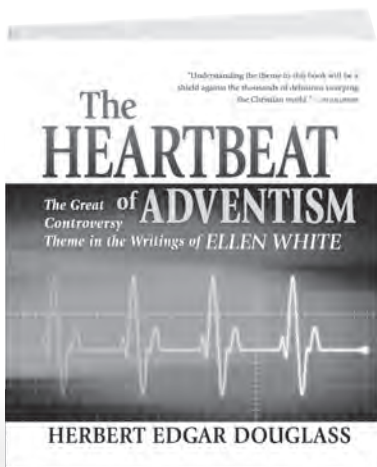
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MOSES NTEKERENZE *shares God's love in the northern United States with his parents and siblings.*

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# Christ, *the End of the Law*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 5:12–21, 6:15–23, 7:13–25, 9:30–10:4, Gal. 3:19–24.*

**Memory Text:** “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (*Romans 10:4, NRSV*).

A well-known magazine ran a full-page ad with a headline that read: “Achieve Immortality! (we’re not kidding).” In a sense they were kidding, because the ad went on to say, “To find out how you can leave a charitable legacy that will make gifts in your name forever, contact us for our free booklet.”

Writers, scholars, philosophers, and theologians through the millennia have all wrestled with the question of death and what death does to the meaning of our lives. Hence, the ad was a clever, if ultimately unsuccessful, way to help people deal with their mortality.

In contrast, all throughout the New Testament we have been shown the only way to achieve immortality, and that is through faith in Jesus as opposed to the keeping of the law—even though we are to keep it. Indeed, obeying the law is not in conflict with grace; on the contrary, it’s what we’re supposed to do as a result of receiving grace.

This week we continue exploring law and grace.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 17.



## Where Sin Abounded *(Rom. 5:12–21)*

Though it points out sins, the law is powerless to save us from them. That very powerlessness, however, shows us our need for Jesus, the only solution for sin.

**Read** Romans 5:12–21. In what way is the message of God’s grace revealed in these texts?

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Notice in this passage the constant association between sin and death. Time and again they appear in immediate relationship with each other. And that’s because sin, the violation of God’s law, leads to death.

Now read Romans 5:20. When the law “entered,” sin abounded, in the sense that the law clearly defined what sin was. However, instead of bringing in the natural result of sin, which is death, Paul says this: “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*NKJV*). In other words, no matter how bad sin is, God’s grace is sufficient to cover it for those who claim His promises by faith.

Influenced by the translation of 1 John 3:4 in the King James Version (“sin is the transgression of the law”), many restrict sin to the violation of the Ten Commandments alone. However, a more literal translation is “sin is lawlessness” (*NKJV*) (*anomia*). Anything that goes against the principles of God is sin. Hence, although the Ten Commandments had not yet been formally revealed when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he violated a command of God (*Gen. 2:17*) and was consequently guilty of sin. Indeed, it is through the sin of Adam that the curse of death has affected all generations of humanity (*Rom. 5:12, 17, 21*).

In contrast to Adam’s unfaithfulness, Jesus’ loyalty to God’s law resulted in the hope of eternal life. Although tempted, Jesus never yielded to sin (*Heb. 4:15*). Here in Romans, Paul extols Jesus’ righteous obedience, which has resulted in eternal life (*Rom. 5:18–21*) for those who accept it. As the Second Adam, Jesus kept the law fully and broke the curse of death. His righteousness can now become that of the believer’s. A person condemned to death by inheriting the sin of the first Adam can now embrace the gift of life by accepting the righteousness of the Second Adam, Jesus.



## Law and Grace *(Rom. 6:15–23)*

One of the most difficult concepts for Christians to comprehend is the continued role of the law for the one saved by grace. If a believer attains righteousness by accepting the sufficiency of the life and death of Jesus, why is it still necessary to keep the law? This question provides another opportunity to repeat a key point: the law was *never* intended to provide salvation; its function (after the Fall) was to define sin. Yet, the Cross doesn't negate the need for a person to follow God's law any more than someone having been pardoned for violating the speed limit can now continue to violate it.

**According to Romans 6:12, 15–23, what are the implications for living a life of grace? See especially Rom. 6:12, 15, 17.**

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Grace and the law are not contraries; they do not negate each other. Instead, they are powerfully connected. The law, because it can't save us, shows us why we need grace. Grace is not opposed to law but to death. Our problem was not the law itself but the eternal death that resulted from violating it.

Paul warns the Christian to be careful about using the promised gift of grace as an excuse to sin (*Rom. 6:12, 15*). Because sin is defined through the law, when Paul tells Christians not to sin, He is basically telling them: keep the law, obey the commandments!

“Paul had ever exalted the divine law. He had shown that in the law there is no power to save men from the penalty of disobedience. Wrongdoers must repent of their sins and humble themselves before God, whose just wrath they have incurred by breaking His law, and they must also exercise faith in the blood of Christ as their only means of pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 393.

**Why is it so easy to get caught up in the faulty logic that says that because we are not saved by the law, we no longer have to obey it?**

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## O Wretched Man! *(Rom. 7:21–25)*

**Read** Romans 7:13–25. How are we to understand these verses? Is Paul talking about an unconverted man, or is this the experience of the converted? What reasons can you give for your answer?

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If you were unsure as to whom these verses refer, you are not alone. Theologians also have wrestled with this question for centuries. The person described here is someone who delights in the law of God (hardly sounds like a nonbeliever) yet who seems to be enslaved to sin (which makes no sense because Christians are promised power over sin). *The SDA Bible Commentary*, after looking at the arguments from both sides, says: “Paul’s main purpose in the passage seems to be to show the relationship that exists between the law, the gospel, and the person who has been awakened to earnest struggles against sin in preparation for salvation. Paul’s message is that, although the law may serve to precipitate and intensify the struggle, only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring victory and relief.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 554.

No matter how we look at these verses, we must always remember that the person who struggles with sin is still capable of making right choices. If this were not the case, all the Pauline (as well as other) promises about power over sin would be meaningless. Also, as Matthew 5 demonstrates, sin often starts before an act is committed. Consequently, a person is in violation of the law simply by thinking something sinful. Ordinarily, this reality could be a source of frustration. However, in the context of Romans 7, the individual may be helpless, but he is not hopeless. For the person who lives in the Spirit, the ever-present law serves as a constant reminder that deliverance from condemnation comes through Jesus (*Rom. 7:24–8:2*).

**Read again the verses for today. In what ways do they parallel your own experience with the Lord? Despite your struggles, how can you experience the hope that Paul nevertheless expressed there?**

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## The Goal of the Law *(Rom. 9:30–10:4)*

The title for this week’s lesson comes from Romans 10:4—“Christ is the end of the law” (*NKJV*). Many who have been preconditioned to think negatively about the law automatically interpret the text to mean, “Christ made the law obsolete.” However, this reading goes against the many references in the book of Romans and other parts of the New Testament that discuss the continued relevance of the law.

**Read** Romans 9:30–10:4. How is Paul explaining here how salvation is by faith and not by the law?

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As with the rest of the epistle to the Romans, Paul’s purpose in these verses is to demonstrate the true source of righteousness. The law is an indicator of righteousness, but it is powerless to make people righteous. Hence, Paul portrays a paradox: the nations (Gentiles) who did not even strive for righteousness have obtained it, while Israel, who strove to keep the righteous law, did not obtain it. Paul is not excluding Jews from righteousness; neither is he saying that every non-Jew is righteous. He is simply saying that the law does not bring righteousness to a sinner, whether Jew or Gentile.

Many Jews were sincere in their desire for righteousness, but their quest was futile (*Rom. 10:2*). They were zealous about serving God but wanted to do so on their own terms. They had taken an object of God’s revelation (the law) and confused it with the Source of their salvation. As good as the law is, it’s not good enough to save anyone. In fact, rather than making a person righteous, the law highlights the individual’s sinfulness; it amplifies the need for righteousness. That’s why Paul describes Christ as the “end” of the law. He is not the “end” in the sense of terminating the law, but in the sense of being the “goal” of the law, the One to whom the law points. The law leads a person to Christ as the repentant sinner looks to Him for salvation. The law reminds all Christians that Christ is our righteousness (*Rom. 10:4*).

**People who take the law seriously are always in danger of legalism, of seeking to establish “their own righteousness.” As we seek to obey God’s law, how can we be careful not to fall into what can be a very subtle trap?**

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## The Disciplinarian *(Gal. 3:19–24)*

In harmony with the book of Romans, Paul is careful to stipulate in Galatians that the purpose of the law is to define sin and not to make people righteous (*Gal. 3:19, 21*).

**Read Galatians 3:23, 24.** What images does Paul use to describe the purpose of the law? What do you think the images mean?

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Depending on the translation, the law is identified in verse 24 as a “schoolmaster,” “taskmaster,” “tutor,” and “custodian,” among other designations. The Greek term refers to a slave employed by a wealthy individual to be a disciplinarian for his son. It was the tutor’s responsibility to ensure that the son learned self-discipline. Although a slave, the tutor was given the authority to do that which was necessary to keep the son in line, even if it meant physical punishment. When the son reached adulthood, the tutor no longer had authority over him.

**In light of the explanation of the role of the tutor, what do you think is the purpose of the law for someone who has received salvation in Christ?**

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Although the tutor no longer had authority over the adult son, it was expected that the lessons that the son had learned would enable him to make mature decisions. Similarly, while the Christian is not under the condemning power of the law, as a person who has attained maturity, he or she is expected to govern his or her actions in accordance with the principles of the law.

In addition to its role as tutor, the law also operated as a caretaker that protected the believer until “the faith” came (*Gal. 3:23*). Here again we see that Christ is the “end,” the goal, of the law. Paul makes that point explicitly when he says that the law brought us to Christ, so that “we might be justified by faith” (*vs. 24*).

**Read carefully Galatians 3:21.** What does it say that should forever end any idea that we can be saved by obedience to the law? Why is this such good news? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

**Further Study:** “The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, talk about the wonderful hope found in Galatians 3:21. How is the gospel of grace so clearly presented there? Why should this text be the absolute antidote to legalism?
- 2** Godly living is not optional for those who call themselves children of God. Many well-meaning individuals stress the need for us to attain “perfection” if we desire to enter the kingdom. Unfortunately, those who embrace this doctrine not only promote self-sufficiency as a key to salvation, but they also ignore the reality of sinful human nature. Humans have to live with inherited tendencies toward sin and are constantly bombarded with temptation. Even more troubling is the discouragement that can come to those who are constantly looking to themselves and how well they are doing as a barometer of their salvation. Compared to the holiness of God and His law, who among us can ever measure up? How, then, can we be careful that while seeking to live godly, faithful lives, we do not get caught up in any theology that puts the hope of our salvation in anything other than the righteousness of Christ covering us?
- 3** What is the goal of the law?

## Toogii's Triumph

My friends call me Toogii [TAW-gee]. I live in the capital city of Mongolia.

My family isn't Christian, so I grew up not knowing much about Jesus. One day a friend of my grandmother gave her an invitation to meetings at the Seventh-day Adventist church, where a missionary was speaking. Grandmother gave the invitation to my aunt, who asked me to go with her to the meetings. I wasn't really interested, but I went out of respect for her. And I was curious about Christians.

I was surprised that I enjoyed the meetings. The people were kind, and the pastor spoke about the kingdom of God. I decided to return to the church again. Before too long, I asked to join the church.

I am the only member of my family who is a believer, and this creates some problems for me. My father tries to keep me from attending church by giving me work to do on Sabbath. But my mother lets me go because what she's heard about Jesus and His teachings is good.

My friends teased me about becoming a Christian, and I felt ostracized by them. Some of them were a bad influence, so when I became a Christian, I quit hanging out with them. Some kids thought I was bad before I became a Christian, and when I became a Christian, they thought I was becoming something even worse. I didn't know how to explain my faith. There aren't that many Adventists in Mongolia, so I felt alone.

The pastor invited me to camp meeting that summer. I was so excited! I made lots of new friends and had lots of fun playing sports and learning about God. It was a great experience. Being with other Christian young people has helped me mature in my faith.

I was shy and didn't talk a lot before, but I'm learning to speak in front of people and express myself. Christ and my new friends in church have given me confidence. Now I can talk to people easily and can express myself better. When my classmates see the changes in me, they realize that God has made a difference in my life and that Christianity isn't a bad thing.

It's difficult to be the only believer in my family, but the friends I've made in church are like my family. They help me stay faithful to God when I feel weak. I'm especially grateful for the youth ministries the church offers. The youth camp was established in part with a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Thank you for caring.



*MUNKHTOGTOKH NYAMDAAVA is a teenager living in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.*

# The Law of God *and* the Law of Christ



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 19:16–22; John 13:34, 35; Gal. 6:1–5; Acts 17:31; John 5:30.*

**Memory Text:** “‘If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love’ ” (*John 15:10, NKJV*).

In most nations a hierarchy of laws exists. At the top are laws that come from the national government and that bind all who reside in the country. Then there are laws on the provincial level that pertain to the inhabitants of certain territories. Finally, local laws govern the smallest districts. Although each division within a country is permitted to make laws that are relevant to its constituents, none can make a law that contradicts the law of the nation. And though circumstances may dictate that a certain law be applied in different ways, the application cannot deviate from the spirit of the law.

As the Supreme Head of the universe, the Creator God has established laws for all of His creatures. When Jesus Christ voluntarily transformed Himself into human flesh, He gave Himself to a life of obedience to His Father (*Phil. 2:5–11*) and to His commandments. Thus, everything that Jesus taught, the perspective that He put on the law, even the “new” commandment that He gave, was always in full harmony with the law of God.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 24.

## The Law and the Prophets

Some believe that the Ten Commandments, delivered through Moses at Sinai, were relevant only to the Israelites before the Cross and are not binding in the New Covenant era of grace. Others teach that Christians are free from the old law, but only those of Jewish heritage, and not Christians, are still expected to adhere to it. As we have seen, though the Bible does teach that the works of the law can save no one, no passage gives a person license to violate God’s law. If any did, it would be a license to sin, and the Bible would blatantly contradict itself on a crucial topic.

In this context we remember that God revealed the terms of His covenant to Israel on tablets of stone that contained the law. However, the Bible contains many other commandments that cover details not found in the Decalogue. In seeking a comprehensive understanding of God’s will, the rabbis counted 613 scriptural laws, which they anchored in the Ten Commandments. Jesus appears to go beyond the rabbis when He announces that He has not come to “abolish the law *or the prophets*” (*Matt. 5:17, NRSV; emphasis supplied*). While summarized in the Ten Commandments, the law of God contains every divine command spoken directly to or through His prophets.

**Compare** Matthew 19:16–22 and 22:34–40. What do these verses tell us about Jesus and the Ten Commandments?

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Although there are hundreds of commandments that God has revealed in His Word, the Ten Commandments provide solid principles that can be applied to all other laws. Hence, Jesus mentioned five of the Ten Commandments when speaking to the rich young ruler. There is an even more potent summary of God’s law in the commandments found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, which is to love God and to love one’s neighbor. Jesus declares, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (*Matt. 22:40, NKJV*). Ultimately, Jesus and His Father are united in purpose as they urge the people of God’s creation to love as they have been loved, and obedience to the law is foundational to how that love is to be expressed.

**What in your life shows your love for God and for your neighbor?**

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## The “Rules” of Love (*John 15:10*)

Scripture provides a number of examples of Jesus’ fidelity to the law of God. For instance, although His words in Luke 2:49 imply that at a young age He understood His identity, when His earthly mother expressed the hurt she felt that resulted from His straying from the family, He humbly accompanied His parents home and “was obedient to them” (*Luke 2:51, NIV*). On another occasion, Jesus refused to bow to Satan when tempted in the wilderness because worship was reserved for God alone (*Luke 4:8*). And there are several illustrations of His Sabbath keeping (*for example, Luke 4:16*). Paul wrote that Jesus’ entire life was based on obedience to God’s will (*Phil. 2:5–11*), and Hebrews says that, although tempted, He never sinned (*Heb. 4:15*). Thus, He could say as He approached His final hours, “I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (*John 15:10, NKJV*).

**Read John 13:34, 35.** What did Jesus mean by saying that this was a “new” commandment?

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Jesus understood that there is a relationship between commandment keeping and love. Though we’re not used to talking about “rules” of love, one could say that, in a real sense, the Ten Commandments are those rules. They show us how God wants us to express our love for Him and others.

God is love (*1 John 4:16*), and so in presenting His commandment to His disciples (*John 13:34, 35*), Jesus is simply amplifying the law that originated in His Father (*John 3:16*). Now, though, more than just loving each other as ourselves, we are to love as Jesus loved us.

“At the time when these words were spoken, the disciples could not understand them; but after they had witnessed the sufferings of Christ, after His crucifixion and resurrection, and ascension to heaven, and after the Holy Spirit had rested on them at Pentecost, they had a clearer conception of the love of God and of the nature of that love which they must have for one another.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 547.

**With today’s lesson in mind, read 1 John 3:16. How can we have this kind of love in our own lives? How can we die the kind of death to self that is needed in order for us to express such love?**

## All Things to All Men

**Take** a close look at the references to law in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. What is Paul saying here? Why such a strong emphasis on law?

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God’s desire is that all people accept His gift of eternal life and become citizens of His everlasting kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul reveals his method of attracting people to God’s kingdom. He understands that there are cultural barriers that hinder people from making a decision for the gospel. Paul is willing to adapt to the culture of the group to whom he was witnessing for the sole purpose of seeing them saved.

Ultimately, all who become a part of God’s kingdom will be subject to His law. Consequently, those who minister for God must also be in line with God’s will. Paul is quick to state that although he uses innovative methods to reach people, he is always careful to remain under the dictates of God’s law. His desire to see people saved will not allow him to compromise the laws of the God he is asking them to serve. He may adapt to cultural laws, but only if there is no conflict with the ultimate law. The principle that governs his method is the “law of Christ” (*1 Cor. 9:21, NASB*).

We can also understand Paul’s reference to the “law of Christ” as the method that Christ used. It was a method based on love for all people and not for just a select few. Paul does not intend for the law of Christ to be seen as an alternative to the law of God. The two work harmoniously together as the loving law of Christ is used to introduce those saved by grace to the law of a loving God. In fact, the entire section, in which Paul so openly explains all that He is willing to do in order to reach the lost, is a perfect example of the kind of self-sacrificing love that is revealed in the “law of Christ.”

**How much self are you willing to deny in order to reach others for Christ? How much self have you already denied in reaching out to others? How much of the “law of Christ” do you follow?**

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## Fulfilling the Law of Christ (*Gal. 6:2*)

Whether revealed in written documents or in nature, the law of God discloses His will to every person capable of understanding (*Rom. 1:20, 2:12–16*). Consequently, no one can claim to be ignorant of the basic requirements of God. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23, NKJV*) and thus are destined for destruction (*Rom. 6:23, Ezek. 18:4*). However, all is not lost: the curse has been reversed by the gift of eternal life, which has been made available through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*Eph. 2:8*).

According to Paul, grace should empower the believer to live an obedient life (*Rom. 6:15, Eph. 2:10, Titus 2:11–14*), though, as we all know too well, we don’t always live as obediently and faithfully as we should.

**According** to Galatians 6:1–5, what is one way to manifest the “law of Christ”?

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It is important to remember that everyone is subject to temptation and can submit to sin in moments of weakness. With this recognition, it is insensitive for a person to immediately condemn a fellow Christian who has fallen. Even Jesus, who had never sinned, was willing to assist those who have been overcome by sin. As Ellen G. White wrote of Jesus, “He did not censure human weakness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 353. Paul admonished Christians to provide assistance for the purpose of restoration (*Gal. 6:1*). In other words, the person who has sinned should be encouraged to abide once again by the precepts of God’s law.

The law of Christ is driven by mercy. Had it not been for His sacrificial death, there would be no reason to keep the law of God. However, because Christ has made eternal life possible, there is an incentive for the faithful to resume keeping God’s law after moments of weakness. Fellow believers should use the law of Christ as a vehicle to transport the repentant sinner back to the arena of God’s law of love.

**Think about a time when you messed up and were shown grace, though you didn’t deserve it (after all, if you did deserve it, it wouldn’t be grace). How can you make sure that you remember the grace that you have received the next time that someone needs to beg some grace from you?**

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## Law and Judgment *(John 5:30)*

Although God’s law is a law of mercy, God will eventually use it as the standard of judgment. God has continued to provide opportunities for sinners to repent and pledge loyalty to Him, but the hour is coming when the cry will go out, “ ‘Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy’ ” (*Rev. 22:11, NRSV*). This announcement serves as a prelude to the final judgment.

**In Revelation 14:7, the first angel proclaims God’s judgment, though a number of other texts speak of Christ’s judgment (for example, Acts 17:31, 2 Tim. 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:10). How does John 5:30 help us understand the role of Jesus in judgment?**

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Although Christ had laid aside His divine nature when He became human (*Phil. 2:5–11*), He still had a special relationship with the Father. When the religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy, He informed His accusers that God had given Him authority to fulfill specific divine tasks (*John 5:19–30*), one of which was judgment. The fact that Christ has been assigned the responsibility of judgment demonstrates the mercy of God. Because Christ has become one with the human race, He is in a position to judge impartially. Given His familiarity with the human experience, Christ would not condemn a person unjustly. In fact, Christ suggests that condemnation does not come from Him, but that the unrepentant sinner condemns himself when he refuses to heed the command of God (*John 12:48*).

Many are familiar with the content of God’s law but don’t know how to keep it. The law is not a checklist we use to see how close we are to the kingdom; instead, it is an instrument that expresses various principles of love. Fulfilling the law does not mean that we obey it to gain personal favor with God, but it beckons each Christian to share the love of God with those who need it. As the standard of judgment, the law serves to measure the level of love that the individual has shared with God and humanity. When Christ presides over the final judgment, He will use God’s unchanging law of love as the standard by which to judge (*James 2:12*).

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Church Discipline,” pp. 260–264; “‘Consider One Another,’” pp. 265, 266, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7.

“‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.’ Here, again, our duty is plainly set before us. How can the professed followers of Christ so lightly regard these inspired injunctions? . . .

“We know but little of our own hearts, and have but little sense of our own need of the mercy of God. This is why we cherish so little of that sweet compassion which Jesus manifests toward us, and which we should manifest toward one another. We should remember that our brethren are weak, erring mortals, like ourselves. Suppose that a brother has through unwatchfulness been over-borne by temptation, and contrary to his general conduct has committed some error; what course shall be pursued toward him? We learn from Bible history that men whom God had used to do a great and good work committed grave sins. The Lord did not pass these by unbuked, neither did he cast off his servants. When they repented, he graciously forgave them, and revealed to them his presence, and wrought through them. Let poor, weak mortals consider how great is their own need of pity and forbearance from God and from their brethren. Let them beware how they judge and condemn others.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, January 25, 1883.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Reflect on the above two paragraphs from *Signs of the Times*. Why is it so important that we bestow grace on those who fall into sin?
- 2 Think about some well-known Bible characters who fell into sin, whom God was yet able to forgive and continue to use. What important lesson is there for us in these examples?
- 3 In what ways can we enforce church discipline while at the same time showing grace and mercy toward those among us who fall into sin? Why should we see the two concepts, discipline and grace, as not being in contradiction with each other?

## The Man God Intends

Rober [*roh-BEHR*] and his family live in a small town in eastern Peru. Rober's wife, Roxana, began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church and took the couple's children with her. She often invited Rober, but he wasn't interested in religion.

However, in his heart, Rober sensed that his life wasn't what it should be. He often drank, but later felt guilty that his bad habits weren't a good example for his children. He wanted to be a better husband and father, but he didn't know how.

Then an accident turned his life around.

"I was drunk when I lost control of my motorcycle," he says. "I landed hard on the street, fracturing my skull and breaking other bones. I was taken to the hospital, unconscious. When I finally recovered enough to return home, Roxana spent hours reading the Bible to me and talking about what Jesus means to her. I had a lot of time to think about my life and God. One day I told Roxana that I wanted to make my life right with God. I wanted to marry her legally and be baptized. The pastor and a lay member came to study the Bible with us, and when we were ready, we were baptized together."

"Before we were united in Christ, our lives were sad," Roxana says. "But now we sing and pray and read the Bible together as a family. We're so happy."

Rober has returned to work, where he shares his new faith with his fellow workers. "Whenever I have a chance, I tell them what I'm learning about Christ," he says. "I have a small computer and use it to show my fellow workers videos about the Bible and God." Rober shares his faith with his extended family. Although they aren't Adventists, they listen, because they've seen changes in his life. Seeing the difference Jesus has made in Rober's life makes them want to make changes in their lives.

Rober has gone from wishing he could be more actively involved with his family to being a model of faith for his family. "We need fathers who will teach their children about Jesus and all He stands for," Rober says. "It's the most important thing we as parents can do."



With Roxana's support, Rober hopes to return to school and study public health so he can help people live a more healthful life. It's one way he can be an example of faith to those around him.

Our mission offerings help to build churches in poor regions of Peru and throughout South America. Thank you for supporting mission with your gifts to God.

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*ROBER AQUINO and his family share their faith in central Peru.*

# Christ, *the Law and the Gospel*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 7:7–12; Deut. 30:15–20; Matt. 7:24–27; Acts 10:34, 35; John 15:10; Eph. 2:1.*

**Memory Text:** “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (*John 1:17, NKJV*).

A century before Christ, Roman poet Lucretius wrote a famous poem “On the Nature of Things” that was lost in history until the Middle Ages. Though often accused of being an atheist, Lucretius didn’t deny in his poem the existence of the gods; he just argued that by virtue of being gods, they would have absolutely no interest in anything human.

In contrast, the Bible argues that there is only one God, and that He’s fervently interested in what happens here. And two manifestations of that passionate interest in humanity are found in His law (which is to guide how we live) and in His grace (His means of saving us even though we have violated that law). Though often seen as contrary to each other, law and grace are inseparably linked. Their methods of operation may be different, but together they reveal that righteousness must triumph over sin. The manifestations of God’s law and His grace provide powerful evidence of His love for humanity and His desire to save us into His eternal kingdom.

\* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 31.*

## Sin and the Law

**Read** Romans 7:7–12. What is Paul saying here about the relationship between sin and law? Why would he even ask such a question as, “Is the law sin?” (*NKJV*)?

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Paul so closely relates the law and sin that he asks the rhetorical question, “Is the law sin?” The answer, of course, is that it’s not; on the contrary, at the end of the section he says, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (*NKJV*). The “therefore” shows the conclusion of his argument: that, far from being sin, the law is indeed holy and good.

What Paul says here is analogous to the relationship between criminal law and crime. Something is criminal only if a law depicts it as such. You might go to jail in one country for doing something that in another country is legal. The reason: one country has a law forbidding that action, the other doesn’t. It is the same action but with two different consequences. What makes the difference? The law.

A crucial point to remember, too, is that just because something is a law doesn’t make it good. In early America, a law required people to return escaped slaves to their masters. It was the law; yet, it was hardly a just one. In the case of God’s law, however, we know that it reflects His loving character. Thus Paul’s words that the law is holy and good; what else could it be, considering who created it?

**What** significance is there in the commandment that Paul uses in Romans 7:7 to prove his point about the law? Why does he use that one instead of another, such as “Thou shalt not steal”?

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Perhaps Paul uses that specific commandment instead of some of the others because it’s not so obvious that it’s wrong. Many people, in and of themselves, might not believe that coveting is wrong. Murder, stealing, yes; one generally doesn’t even need the Ten Commandments to know that. But coveting? So it is a perfect example to make his point that it’s the law that shows us what sin is. Otherwise, he might not have known that coveting was wrong.



## The Law and Israel *(Deut. 30:15–18)*

The giving of the law to Israel was a special act. Just before He gave the law to Moses, God reminded His people that they are “ ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ ” (*Exod. 19:6, NKJV*). Among all nations on the face of the earth, it was to Israel that God specially revealed His law (*Rom. 9:4*). The law was not intended to be a burden to the people but to be a tool through which the chosen nation would reveal to the masses the moral code that is the foundation of God’s government. Israel was to be a partner with God in the mission of universal evangelism, and God’s law was to be the identifying mark for God’s spokespersons.

**According** to Deuteronomy 30:15–20, what is the relationship between the law and the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Also, even more crucial, how do these principles apply to us today as well, under the new covenant? *See Matt. 7:24–27.*

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God chose Israel to be His representatives. Israel would be the people through whom the nations of the earth received the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, the blessings were by no means automatic. As a chosen nation, Israel was expected to walk in harmony with the Lord’s will. Moses made it clear that life and prosperity would come to the people only if they observed God’s “commandments, decrees, and ordinances” (*Deut. 30:15, 16, NRSV*).

Given the numerous stories of rebellion that mar Israel’s history, Israel as a nation failed to live up to the covenant conditions. Yet, we must not forget that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23, NKJV*). No nation on earth has fulfilled the will of God. Even in recent history, nations that profess to be Christian have misrepresented the cause of God with warmongering, prejudice, and oppression.

**In your own experience, how are obedience and faith related? That is, when you obey, what happens to your faith in contrast to when you disobey? How does obedience strengthen faith?**

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## The Law and the Nations (*Acts 10:34, 35*)

**Read** Acts 10:34, 35; 17:26, 27; Romans 1:20; and 2:14. What is the central teaching of these texts?

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Despite Israel's mistakes, God did not leave the people in other nations without a witness. Those who were not privileged to receive God's written revelation received divine messages through the pages of natural revelation (*Rom. 1:20*). God's book of nature contains enough information to direct a person to Him.

God has also instilled a measure of spiritual desire in every human being. According to Paul, those who sense God's indwelling Spirit will engage in a quest to find Him (*Acts 17:27*). So many people sense an emptiness in their lives that nothing this world offers—fame, power, money, sex—can ultimately fulfill. At its heart, this was the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. This emptiness, this dissatisfaction, often leads people in a quest for something beyond, for something that transcends everyday existence. They are drawn to revealed truth in a desire to quell the longings and emptiness of their souls.

Whether God's will is revealed through written documents or nature, the person who receives it has the responsibility to live it. Truth is truth, regardless of the vehicle that delivers it, and those who suppress the truth will experience the wrath of God (*Rom. 1:18*). Consequently, although many people may not have received the Bible or the Ten Commandments, God still holds them accountable for the portions of truth that they have gleaned. Ultimately, everyone will be judged, and the standard of judgment will be law: either the law God expressly revealed through His prophet Moses, or, for those who are ignorant of the written law—the law of conscience, which has been developed by listening to God's voice in nature.

**What great disappointments have you faced that have helped you see just how untrustworthy and unsatisfactory the things of this world really can be? How can you learn from these disappointments about what truly matters?**

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## Grace and Truth *(John 1:17)*

John condensed the history of salvation into one verse: “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (*John 1:17, NKJV*). As a result of Adam’s sin, all humanity has been affected by the curse of death. The curse is intensified by the fact that no one born to human parents, except Jesus, has been free from sinful inclinations. Therefore, God selected a people to whom He revealed His law, intending that those elected would be His light to the other nations. God did not give the law to Israel as a means to salvation but as a constant reminder of their need for righteousness.

**What** do **Philippians 2:8**, **John 15:10**, and **Matthew 26:39** tell us about the kind of life that Jesus lived?

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When he disobeyed the express command of God, the first Adam plunged the entire world into disarray and bondage. On the other hand, through His obedient life, the Second Adam, Jesus, came to deliver the world from the bondage that the first Adam had brought. When Jesus walked this earth, He voluntarily subjected His own will to the will of His Father and chose not to sin. Unlike the first Adam, who brought condemnation and falsehood into the world, Jesus brought in “grace and truth.” Grace and truth did not supplant the law. Jesus showed, instead, why the law alone was not enough to procure salvation. The truth that He brought was a more complete understanding of grace.

**According** to **Romans 6:23** and **Ephesians 2:8**, what is the nature of the grace that originates in Jesus? How did Jesus supply grace for humans?

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The Greek word translated as “grace” (*charis*) can also mean “gift” and is related to the term for joy (*chara*). The gift that Jesus gives to humanity is eternal life. Further, grace manifests itself as the indwelling presence of Christ that enables the individual to participate in the righteousness that the law promotes. Paul states that in condemning sin in the flesh, Jesus has made it possible that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (*Rom. 8:4, NKJV*). Grace not only frees us from the condemnation of the law, but it enables us to keep the law in the way that we are called to do.

## The Law and the Gospel (*Rom. 1:16, 17*)

No matter how “good” our lives are, none can escape the constant reminders of sin. Inevitably, happiness is interrupted by sickness, death, disaster. On a personal level, feelings of spiritual security are often challenged by memories of past sins and, even worse, by the urge to sin again.

**In what ways do Romans 6:23, 7:24, and Ephesians 2:1 describe the impact of sin?**

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A person living in sin, in unrighteousness, is merely a walking corpse just waiting for the day when the last breath exits his body. When Paul assesses the human condition, he cries out in desperation, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (*Rom. 7:24, NKJV*). This is a cry for liberation from unrighteousness. Paul quickly realizes that deliverance comes through Jesus (*Rom. 7:25*).

This is the gospel. The good news is that we who have been trapped in bodies of unrighteousness can be covered with the righteousness of Christ. The gospel is the guarantee that we can escape the condemnation of the law because we now possess the righteousness that the law promotes (*Rom. 8:1*).

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, the story of Jesus’ death was still being circulated throughout the empire. Those who had heard were fully aware that the way He had died was scandalous. People whose loved ones had been executed on a cross were often left to a life of shame. However, Paul and countless other Christians understood that Christ’s “shameful” death was the most powerful event in human history. That is why Paul declares, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes” (*Rom. 1:16, author’s translation*). And the heart of that gospel is the great promise that in the end, death will not have the final say and that those saved by Jesus will live forever in a new earth.

**Many people believe that life is meaningless because it always ends in death. So, nothing we do will matter in the long run. It’s hard to argue with that logic, isn’t it? If everything we have ever done and every person we have ever influenced will all forever be lost and forgotten, what can life mean?**

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**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Preaching the Distinctive Truths,” pp. 231, 232, in *Evangelism*; “The Faith That Works” and “How Faith Is Made Perfect,” pp. 88, 89, in *The Faith I Live By*.

“Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 19.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell on the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study. Think through the wonderful and hopeful truths found in these words for even the worst of sinners. How can we learn to claim these promises for ourselves and live as if we really believe them?
- 2 Although God gave His law to Israel through Moses, the Bible suggests that He uses other methods to reveal His will to people who may not have access to His written revelation (for example, *Rom. 1:20; 2:14; Acts 17:26, 27*). If God does indeed speak to all people, what is the purpose of missionaries and evangelists?
- 3 John 1:17 states that “grace and truth” originated with Jesus Christ. Using that text, many people place the law in opposition to “grace and truth.” Why is this a false dichotomy? In what ways do the law and “grace and truth” all work together to reveal to us the character of God as seen in the plan of salvation?
- 4 Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky created a character who wanted to study why more people *didn’t* kill themselves. As an atheist, he couldn’t understand why people would want to live meaningless lives that were often so full of pain. Discuss the logic of this thinking.

## The Stolen Watermelon

Mpo [*m'POH*] and Tendai [*TEN-dai*]\* live in Zambia. One day they were hot and thirsty after playing. They sat down in the shade to rest. Then Mpo jumped up. "There's a *b-i-g* watermelon growing in a field near here. Let's go get it!"

The two boys set off toward the field. Mpo ran ahead and grabbed the watermelon from the vine and raced toward the bushes. Tendai followed his friend. He wanted to ask permission to eat the watermelon before taking it, but when he reached his friend, Mpo had already broken the watermelon open. The sight of the juicy melon made Tendai's mouth water. He scooped up a piece of melon and ate it. Soon the boys had eaten the entire watermelon. They sat back, full and satisfied.

It was getting late, and Tendai hurried home. When he arrived home, his mother said, "Dinner is almost ready."

"I'm not hungry," Tendai said. "I ate with Mpo."

Mother frowned. "OK," she said. "Then do your chores and come inside for worship."

After worship, Tendai lay down on his straw mat and fell asleep. He dreamed that his family went to heaven, but he couldn't enter because he had stolen the watermelon. He awoke with a start, crying. The next night and the next he had the same dream. He awoke the third morning knowing that he must tell his mother about the stolen watermelon.

"We must tell the farmer whose watermelon you stole," his mother said. They walked to the farmer's house. Tendai confessed that he and his friend had stolen the watermelon. "It was wrong," he said. "I'm sorry."

The farmer nodded. "It was wrong to take the watermelon. Now I must buy another one. Do you have the money to pay for a watermelon?"

Tendai shook his head.

"Then you will work to pay for the watermelon," the farmer said. His mother nodded at Tendai. "I need a new rubbish pit. I'll show you where to dig it." Tendai took the man's shovel and followed him to a field. He began digging. It was hard work, and the sun was hot on his back. But he kept digging until the rubbish pit was done. Then he gathered the rubbish from the land around the pit.

Now when Tendai is tempted to do something wrong, he remembers the hot sun beating on his back as he dug the rubbish pit. He remembers his dreams, too, and he turns away from temptation, for he doesn't want to miss out on heaven.

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\* *Not their real names. This story was told to Adventist Mission by Mirriam Kashweka.*

# Christ, *the Law and the* Covenants



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 9:12–17, 17:2–12, Gal. 3:15–28, Deut. 9:9, Heb. 10:11–18, Heb. 9:15–28.*

**Memory Text:** “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (*Hebrews 9:15, NIV*).

God's eternal decision to save humanity has been revealed to us through the ages by the covenants. Though the Bible speaks of covenants in the plural (*Rom. 9:4, Gal. 4:24, Eph. 2:12*), there is really only the covenant of grace, in which salvation is given to sinners, not on the basis of their merits but on the merits of Jesus that are offered to all who claim those merits by faith. The plural, *covenants*, simply means that God has advanced His saving purposes by restating the covenant in various ways in order to meet the needs of His people in different times and settings. It is always, though, one covenant—the eternal covenant of God's saving grace.

The heart of this covenant is our Lord's steadfast, faithful love, a love that the Bible at times even equates with the covenants themselves (*see Deut. 7:9, 1 Kings 8:23, Dan. 9:4*). As part of that covenant, God calls His people to obey His law, not as a means of salvation but as the fruit of it. Law and grace together have always been central to God's eternal covenant.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 7.

## Covenant Signs *(Gen. 9:12–17)*

A covenant can be simply defined as an agreement between two parties based upon promises made by either one or by both parties. There are two basic methods by which a covenant can operate. In the first, both parties to the covenant agree to the terms of the relationship and make mutual promises. This would be the case in a marriage, business merger, or even the purchase of property. In the second category, one party initiates the covenant by stipulating both the promises and the nonnegotiable terms, and the other party is invited to participate. Examples include payment of taxes or enrollment at an educational institution. In both instances, either party is free to withdraw from the covenant, but there is usually a consequence. (For instance, a person who fails to pay his mortgage will lose his home, or a citizen who refuses to remit taxes will be prosecuted.)

A covenant is usually sealed with at least one symbol. For instance, a person purchasing a home places several signatures on a mortgage agreement with a lending institution, which keeps the title deed for the property in trust until the full amount is paid. Or married people are issued a legal document of marriage by the state. The symbol itself is not the covenant but an indicator that a person is obligated to a covenant.

**Read** Genesis 9:12–17 and 17:2–12. What is the difference between the symbol and the covenant in these cases? Also, what are the differences between these two covenants?

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In Genesis 9:9, God covenants with creation that He will never again destroy the earth with water. Whenever a rainbow appears in the sky, all are expected to remember God’s promise. The same is true for the mark of circumcision, which was supposed to remind every Jewish male of His people’s role in blessing the nations. One covenant was made with all humanity; the other, specifically with the nation of Israel. Also, in the covenant made with humanity after the Flood, the people didn’t have to do anything; the promise was just there, regardless of what the people did. This wasn’t so with the second one, the one made with Israel; the people had to fulfill their part of the deal.



## Covenant Promises

*Covenants* are based on *promises*. In fact, it is possible to use the two terms interchangeably. Of course, when a covenant is made, it is expected that the person who makes the promise (covenant) has the ability to deliver what is promised (covenanted).

In the Old Testament, some covenants were local and limited affairs (*see, for instance, Gen. 31:43–54*).

The incident with Jacob and Laban demonstrates that covenants can be transactions made within and between societies. The monument at Mizpah was to serve as the sign of a treaty that would apply only to the two clans. When those to whom the treaty applied had died, the terms of the treaty would be irrelevant. Unlike this covenant made between humans, the covenants that Yahweh instituted with Noah and Abraham have everlasting implications.

**How** does Galatians 3:15–28 help to explain the broader implications of the Abrahamic covenant?

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Throughout the Bible, God has made several universal covenants in which He makes promises that are relevant to all humanity. Recognizing that the entire earth had been affected by the Flood, Yahweh promised not to allow His creation to be devastated by water again. In the case with Abraham, God saw humanity's need for righteousness, and so He promised to provide a blessing for all nations through Abraham's seed (*Gen. 22:18*).

Though God made the Sinai covenant with a specific nation, it also has universal significance. God was very clear that any foreigner could be a part of the chosen people (*for example, Exod. 12:48, 49*), and Israel's mission was to be an evangelistic light to the world (*Exod. 19:5, 6*).

**What is your own personal understanding of your covenantal relationship with God? That is, what has God promised you, and what has He asked of you in return for those promises?**

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## Tablets of the Covenant

Although a covenant is based on promises, there are usually conditions to meet before the promises are fulfilled. The Abrahamic covenant involved the circumcision of all males who were born either to Abraham or his descendants. When Yahweh covenanted with Israel, He personally engraved the requirements for the relationship on tablets of stone (*Deut. 9:8–11*). These requirements, preserved in the Ten Commandments, were to form the basis of God’s everlasting covenant with all humans.

Because they detail certain terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments are often termed the “tablets of the covenant” (*Deut. 9:9, NKJV*). The Ten Commandments are not intended to be an obstacle course designed to make life hard for those who have entered into the covenant with God; instead, as an expression of God’s love, the commandments have been given for the benefit of those who have entered into a covenant relationship with their Lord.

**In what ways do Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 10:11–18 uphold the everlasting nature of God’s law in the New Covenant?**

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Under the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai, the Israelites and those who joined the community were obligated to demonstrate faithfulness to the covenant by keeping the Ten Commandments. When they violated a commandment, they were expected to offer an animal sacrifice if they wished to have their sins forgiven.

Under the New Covenant at Mount Calvary, God’s people are still obligated to keep the Ten Commandments. However, when they sin they don’t have to offer continuous sacrifices, because Jesus is their full and complete sacrifice (*Heb. 9:11–14*). The New Covenant is so much better than the old because now, by faith, we claim the promises of forgiveness offered to us through the sacrifice of Jesus. “There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1077.

**What does it mean to have God’s law written in your heart? How does this differ from merely understanding God’s law as a code of obedience?**

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## The Covenant and the Gospel (*Heb. 9:15–22*)

There were strong consequences for violating certain biblical covenants. Yahweh warned Abraham that any male who was not circumcised would be cut off from the chosen (*Gen. 17:14*), and a litany of curses was directed toward those who refused to abide by the terms of the Sinai covenant (*Deut. 27:11–26*). Ultimately, those who violated the terms of the covenant would be punished with death (*Ezek. 18:4*). The same is true for the New Covenant: those who refuse to keep God's law are also denied access to eternal life (*Rom. 6:23*).

**Read** Hebrews 9:15–28. In what ways is the gospel revealed in these verses?

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Hebrews 9:15–28 repeats the gospel story as it proclaims the part that Christ plays in securing the promises for believers. Verse 15 points out that Jesus functions as the “mediator” of the New Covenant, who, through His death, offers eternal life to those who otherwise would face eternal destruction.

In verses 16 and 17, some Bible translations switch from discussing “covenant” and introduce the term “will” instead, even though the same Greek word is used. This brings in the whole idea of death, the death of Jesus for us. When viewed in that context, the passage reminds the believer that without Christ the covenant requires the death of each sinner. However, the sinner can be covered and then cleansed by Christ's shed blood and thus be among those who “eagerly wait” His return (*Heb. 9:28, NKJV*).

“Then we shall know that our own righteousness is indeed as filthy rags, and that the blood of Christ alone can cleanse us from the defilement of sin, and renew our hearts in His own likeness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 29.

**God Himself, in the person of Jesus, bore in Himself the punishment for our sins in order to spare us that punishment, which we deserve. What does this tell us about the character of God, and why we can trust Him, no matter our circumstances?**

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## Covenant Benefits *(Eph. 2:6)*

In many instances people can experience the promises of a covenant before all the terms are even met. For instance, a person purchasing a home has the opportunity to live in the home before it is paid for. Or a citizen enjoys the public services offered by the government before he has even started paying taxes. Those who enter into a covenant with God can also start to experience the benefits of the covenant before the promises are actualized in the future.

Think, for instance, about the Ten Commandments, and how much pain and suffering people could avoid if they simply followed them. Who hasn't personally experienced the heartache that comes from the violation of these commandments? Even worse, the suffering that comes isn't always limited to the one who violates the law; often others, even those closest to the sinner, suffer, as well.

**According** to these texts, what other benefits can we find, even now, through being in a covenant relationship with Jesus?

*2 Cor. 4:16–18* \_\_\_\_\_

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*1 John 5:11–13* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Phil. 1:6* \_\_\_\_\_

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*John 5:24* \_\_\_\_\_

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Jesus uses very strong language in the Gospel of John when He reports that those who accept Him have already “ ‘passed from death into life’ ” (*John 5:24, NKJV*). So confident is the believer in his or her salvation that although confined to this earth, he or she can claim to be sitting in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (*Eph. 2:6*).

**If someone were to ask you, “What does it mean to be sitting with Jesus in heaven now (as Ephesians 2:6 says),” what would you answer, and why?**

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**Further Study:** For more information on this week's topic, read Ellen G. White, "The Covenant of Grace," pp. 131–137, in *God's Amazing Grace*.

"This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' Gen. 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it, and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God's law. . . .

"The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, and it is called the 'second,' or 'new,' covenant, because the blood by which it was sealed was shed after the blood of the first covenant. . . .

"The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant. . . .

"There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus."—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 75.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What do Exodus 31:16 and Isaiah 56:4–6 suggest about the importance of the Sabbath to the covenant? See also Ezekiel 20.
- 2 It is often thought that the Old Covenant, the one established with Abraham, was a covenant of works, in contrast to the New Covenant, which is of grace. Why is this idea wrong? What Bible verses can you find that prove it was always a covenant of grace? Why must it always have been by grace and never by works?
- 3 Though Ephesians 1 doesn't use the phrase "everlasting covenant," in what way do these words help us to understand why the covenant has been called that?
- 4 God promised that He would never again destroy the world by a flood, a promise symbolized by the rainbow. If, as some suggest, Noah's flood were only local, what does that make of God's promise? Why is the idea that the Flood was not global a major assault on Bible truth? (After all, look at all the local floods that have happened since then. If Noah's flood were only local, what would these other local floods do to God's covenant promise?)

## They Need to Hear

While sitting in class in his Papua New Guinea high school, young Willie Siso noticed that he was having difficulty hearing. A doctor told him he had inflammation in his ear. But Willie's hearing continued to fail.

*Why is God allowing this?* he wondered. As his hearing deteriorated, Willie began learning sign language. He graduated from a teacher's college and took a job teaching in a middle school. In addition to his regular class, he taught five hearing-impaired students of various ages.

In 2011, Willie enrolled at Pacific Adventist University to study theology. While teaching hearing-impaired children in a nearby school, he met Noah, an assistant teacher who was a Seventh-day Adventist. Noah told Willie that he didn't attend church. "I can't understand what is being said, and there's no one to interpret for me," he said. Then Noah's face lit up. "Since you can still hear some, and you know sign language, let's form a ministry for the hearing impaired."

Willie and Noah began visiting hearing-impaired Adventists and inviting them to meet for worship on the university campus. Willie can still hear enough to interpret for the group of grateful believers.

The members welcomed the hearing-impaired believers and are helping with transportation to and from the campus outside the city. The group is growing and now includes ten regular members plus visitors.

When the church pastor invited Willie to preach for church, he agreed, signing his own sermon for his hearing-impaired friends who attended. The next month Willie invited Noah to preach and the hearing-impaired group to lead out in Sabbath School. Willie interpreted for the hearing congregation.

"I have a burden for the hearing impaired," Willie says. "I'd like to upload sermons in Pidgin sign language so that the hearing impaired can watch and be blessed."

Willie is teaching sign language to other students on the Pacific Adventist University campus so that they can help reach out to the hearing impaired. "Almost every pastor and most other workers come across hearing-impaired people in their ministries," he says. "If they can sign, they can minister to these people."

Willie's ministry continues to grow as the hearing-impaired members visit different churches each Sabbath. "Now I realize that God is using my hearing disability to open a new ministry for others in southern Papua New Guinea. Jesus said, 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations'" (*Matt. 24:14, NIV*). The hearing impaired are part of our world; they need to hear too."

Our mission offerings support Pacific Adventist University, which serves students from Papua New Guinea and across the South Pacific Division. Thank you.

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*WILLIE SISO is a student at Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea. He is preparing to serve God and the hearing impaired as a pastor.*

# The Apostles *and the Law*



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 3:31, 6:15, Acts 10:9–14, John 15:1–11, James 2:1–26, Heb. 3:7–19, Jude 5–7.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (*Romans 7:12, NKJV*).

**W**ith so much evidence for the continued validity of God's law, why do so many Christians argue against it?

First, some (as we have seen) look at certain New Testament texts that condemn a false understanding of the law's function but conclude that the problem is with the law itself. As a result, they claim that the Ten Commandments are not obligatory for those under the new covenant.

Second, others are so convinced that the Sabbath is not binding on Christians that, in order to justify this position, they claim that all the commandments have been crucified with Jesus on the cross.

Third, some argue that the other nine commandments are in effect but that the fourth, the seventh-day Sabbath, has been superseded by Sunday, which is kept in honor of the resurrection of Jesus.

Numerous problems exist with all these positions. This week we'll look at the attitude of Christ's apostles concerning the law, because surely if it were to have been nullified or modified after Christ's death, the apostles would have known something about it.

\* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.*

## Paul and the Law

Paul, it has been said, was the true founder of Christianity. That is wrong, of course. Though Paul contributed much to our theological understanding of Christian doctrine, including 13 of the 27 New Testament books, practically all the teachings in his writings can be found elsewhere in Scripture. The main reason why some claim that Paul started a “new” religion is the misconception over his teaching about law and grace.

**Look** at the following texts: **Romans 3:28; 6:14; 7:4; and Galatians 3:24, 25.** From a first glance, why isn’t it hard to see why some think that these verses nullify the law?

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Read in isolation, these texts definitely give the impression that the law is no longer relevant for the Christian. However, all these verses belong to a broader context that we must see in order to understand what Paul is truly saying.

**Examine** the passages in which each of the above texts occurs, paying special attention to **Romans 3:31, 6:15, 7:7–12, and Galatians 3:21.** How do these verses, as well as the context as a whole, help us to better understand Paul’s point about the law?

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For those who don’t understand the concept of justification by faith, Paul may seem to be contradicting himself. In the same breath he claims that the Christian is not under the law; yet the same Christian is obligated to keep the law. The problem is solved when we remember that God demands righteousness from those who claim to be in relationship with Him. The standard of righteousness is His law. However, when people measure up against His law, they fall short and are therefore condemned by the law. If the law were the means to salvation, then none would have any hope of eternal life. The hope of the Christian is not found in the law but in Jesus Christ, who not only kept the law perfectly but through God’s miraculous power allows believers to share in His righteousness (*Rom. 8:3, 4*). The Christian can now serve the law of God with a free conscience because Christ has taken away the law’s condemnation (*Rom. 7:25–8:2*). The grace that comes through Christ does not release us from the law but rather compels us to obey it.



## Peter and the Law (*1 Pet. 2:9*)

Peter was one of Jesus' closest apostles. Among the first selected, Peter was present at many of the major events in the ministry of Jesus. It was he who, at Caesarea Philippi, made the declaration that Jesus was the Messiah; and Peter followed his Savior to the house of Caiaphas on the night that Jesus was arrested and tried. And on the morning when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples by the sea, it was Peter who received specific instructions regarding the ministry of Christ. When the first group of believers gathered on the day of Pentecost, Peter was the chief spokesperson. Certainly, if the law had been changed in any way, Peter would have known.

**What** does Acts 10:9–14 tell us about Peter's adherence to the Jewish law after Jesus' ascension? If Peter thought this way about laws concerning food, what can we imagine his view was on the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments?

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Peter received his vision several years after the ascension of Jesus. As a result of the disciples' preaching, thousands of Jews had already accepted Jesus as the Messiah. There is nothing in the biblical record to suggest that the content of the Christian message included instructions to reject the law. In a powerful way, the incident in Acts 10 demonstrates that the earliest Christians fully identified with their Jewish roots.

**Compare** 1 Peter 2:9 with Exodus 19:6. What is the context of Exodus 19:6?

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When Peter referred to his audience as a "royal priesthood, a holy nation" (*NKJV*), they would have recalled instantly the story of the giving of the law at Sinai. As the heirs of Israel, they were expected to abide by the terms of the covenant made explicit in the law of God. So immediately after reminding the people of their status, Peter urges them to live lives of righteousness (*1 Pet. 2:11, 12*). He also warns his audience to be wary of false teachers promoting a law-free gospel (*2 Pet. 2:21, 3:2*).

**Remember how badly Peter messed up; and yet, look at the grace extended to him. How can we learn (1) to extend that kind of grace to others and (2) to accept grace for ourselves when we mess up?**

## John and the Law

John is second to Paul in the number of books contributed to the New Testament. This is the same John who wrote the Gospel, three letters, and the book of Revelation. Like Peter, he was among the first disciples Jesus chose, and he also had a special relationship with Jesus. Because of his closeness to Jesus, he is often referred to as “John the Beloved.” Judging from the ending of his Gospel (*John 21:25*), John knew a lot of personal information about Jesus. Surely one who was as close to Jesus as John would have known if Jesus had set aside God’s law.

**Read** John 15:1–11 and 1 John 2:3–6. What do these verses together tell us about how we should relate to God’s “commands”?

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Toward the end of His earthly life, Jesus could testify to His disciples that He had been faithful to His Father’s commandments, and, as a result, had “remained” in His Father’s love (*John 15:10*). Jesus did not see the commandments as negative obstacles to be dismissed or discarded; rather, He saw them as guidelines for a loving relationship with Him and with other people. When John, the beloved disciple, reminds Christians of their obligation to God, he uses the same language of love and unity that Jesus does in the Gospel. In fact, John understood that love has always been the essence of the law (*for example, 2 John 6*). A person cannot claim to be keeping the law if he or she is not involved in loving relationships with God and other people.

“The law of God requires that we love our fellow men as we love ourselves. Then every power and action of the mind must be put forth to that end—to do the greatest amount of good. . . . How pleasing to the Giver for man to hold the royal gifts of the soul so that they shall tell with power upon others! They are the connecting link between God and man, and reveal the Spirit of Christ and the attributes of heaven. The power of holiness, seen but not boasted of, speaks more eloquently than the most able sermons. It speaks of God, and opens to men their duty more powerfully than mere words can do.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 20, p. 138.

**What is your own experience with the link between law and love? That is, on a personal practical level, how is love expressed by obedience to God’s law?**

## James and the Law

**“Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors”** (*James 2:7–9, NKJV*).

There is only one book in the New Testament that is attributed to James. While the author does not stipulate which James he is, it is generally accepted that the letter comes from James, the brother of Jesus. Though perhaps at first skeptical about Jesus’ Messiahship (*John 7:5*), James eventually rose to an influential leadership position in the New Testament church (*Acts 15:13, Gal. 1:19*). Again, if Jesus had intended to abrogate the divine law, His own brother certainly would have known.

**Read James 2:1–26. What is the basic message of the chapter? Why would James summarize the law as he did in verses 7–9, only then immediately to say what he said about keeping all the commandments? How do these verses show the link between love and obeying God’s law?**

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Misunderstanding Paul’s teaching on the law, some argue that James and Paul are opposed to each other regarding the role of the law. The major point of contention is over the place of works in salvation. Paul declares that we are saved by grace through faith apart from works (*Eph. 2:8, 9*), while James emphasizes that “faith without works is dead” (*James 2:26, NKJV*). These statements are not contradictory; James is merely expressing in a forceful manner what Paul had said numerous times about grace not nullifying the law. Like Paul in Romans 13:9, James fully understands that the essence of God’s law is love (*James 2:8*). No one can truly claim to keep God’s commandments if he or she does not demonstrate practical acts of love.

## Jude and the Law

Jude, one of the shortest books in the New Testament, is believed to have been written by another brother of Jesus. While the author refers to himself as a “slave” of Jesus Christ, he does admit to being the brother of James. Because Matthew gives James and Jude as names for two of Jesus’ four brothers (*Matt. 13:55*), the Jude (sometimes called Judas) of this brief epistle is generally accepted to be the Savior’s brother. As with all the other biblical writers we have studied, Jude would have known if Jesus had set the law aside.

Although Jude makes reference to neither law nor commandments, his entire letter is about fidelity to God and the consequences of transgressing His law.

**Read** Jude 4. What is he saying here that is relevant to our whole discussion?

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The very mention of grace demands the existence of law, because grace would not be necessary if there were no sin (*Rom. 5:18–6:15*). What these false teachers were saying was so bad that Jude equated it with denying the Lord Himself.

**How** does Hebrews 3:7–19 help to shed light on Jude 5–7? How do these verses together show us the relationship between obedience and faith?

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In his own diplomatic style, Jude reminds his audience about the experience of the Israelites, who had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. God had demonstrated His strength to them and had even given them His law, but when they became unfaithful, they faced terrible consequences that came from being separated from Him. Jude makes it very clear that people can, indeed, fall away, and those who do will face judgment. Jude is as clear as is the rest of Scripture: all who claim to have faith must be willing to express that faith through an obedient life.

**Read the book of Jude. Amid all his strong warnings, what promises can you discover there for yourself?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Law in the Christian Age,” *Signs of the Times*, August 5, 1886.

“Why should the apostles teach repentance toward God?—Because the sinner is in trouble with the Father. He has transgressed the law; he must see his sin, and repent. What is his next work?—To look to Jesus, whose blood alone can cleanse from all sin. Faith in Christ is necessary; for there is no saving quality in law. The law condemns, but it cannot pardon the transgressor. The sinner must depend on the merits of the blood of Christ. ‘Let him take hold of my strength,’ says our merciful Redeemer, ‘that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.’ Our Lord declared that he would love most to whom most was forgiven; and he only will feel that he needs forgiveness who sees himself as he is, defiled by sin, a transgressor of God’s holy law. He who has the fullest conviction of the sacred claims of the law, will most clearly see the enormity of his offenses, and will feel that he is indeed forgiven much.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 5, 1886.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Carefully read the above statement by Ellen G. White. How does this excerpt shed light on the biblical teachings covered in this quarter? What does it mean that a sinner must “depend on the merits of the blood of Christ”?
- ② Dwell more on the warning in Jude 4. If the men are proclaiming the grace of God, they obviously are believers. Yet, Jude says that they are denying the Lord. What serious implications does this have for those who claim that God’s grace nullified the law? When people claim the law was done away with, what are they really trying to get rid of?
- ③ How does the denial of the law, or even of one of the commandments, play into Satan’s hands as he seeks to “overthrow” the law of God?

## Mohammad's New School

Mohammad looked at the old school building and wondered what his parents had done to him. Mohammad and his parents live in Zamboanga, a city in the southern Philippines.

A friend had told Mohammad's parents about the Seventh-day Adventist school, and they went to inspect it. They found an old building in serious need of repair. The school's principal assured them that the entire school would be replaced soon. But Mohammad's parents didn't see the leaky metal roof or the holes in the screens. They saw happy children who loved their teachers and teachers who really cared for the children. They decided to send Mohammad to the Adventist school.

Reluctantly, Mohammad stepped into class wondering whether he would make any friends there. Even before class started, several children welcomed him. At lunchtime, some boys invited Mohammad to eat with them and join their games at recess. Maybe his new school wasn't so bad after all! He discovered Pathfinders and learned to love camping and mastering new skills such as knot tying.

Near the end of the school year, Mohammad's teacher announced that when they returned from summer vacation they would have a new school. The children gladly helped their teachers box up the textbooks, clear out the closets, and empty the shelves. Then on the first day of vacation, the students stood a distance away and watched their old school building tumble down.

When Mohammad returned after school break and saw the new school, he was amazed. Students gladly helped teachers unpack books and move in the new desks. Mohammad likes the new school, but he now knows that the building isn't as important as what happens inside the classroom. "In this school I learned to love God in a new way," he says. "My parents are glad, and so am I."

One thing made Mohammad sad, however. He would soon graduate and go on to high school, and the new Adventist high school wasn't finished yet. "I'll miss the friends I've made here," he says. "I'll miss praying with them."

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping build the high school section of Zamboanga Adventist School. Perhaps Mohammad can study there after all.



*Zamboanga Adventist School.*

# Christ's Church *and the Law*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:16–3:7, Genesis 6, Genesis 12, Deut. 7:6–12, Gal. 3:6–16, Rev. 12:17, 14:6–12.*

**Memory Text:** “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Revelation 14:12, NKJV*).

In a relay race, a team usually consists of four runners. Team members may have competed against each other at another time, but now, as a part of the same team, they must learn to think as one. In the race itself, the length of the course is equally divided between the participants. One team member alone can race at any given time—the one who is holding the baton. The baton is skillfully passed from one team member to the next until the race is finished. In a sense, the baton is the only symbol of continuity among the members of the relay team.

God's church is something like a relay team. Starting with Adam in the garden, the baton has been passed through several phases of salvation history: from Noah to Abraham to Sinai to the New Testament church to the Reformation church, and now to those who proclaim the three angels' messages.

The symbol of continuity for God's church is His law, which, after the Fall, must always be coupled with God's saving grace. Together, both are the essence of the gospel.

This week's lesson traces the continuity of the law (and grace) in God's church through the ages.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 21.

## From Adam to Noah

In one sense, we can speak of a “church of Christ” only since the New Testament era, when believers first testified to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, we can see “Christ’s church” in a broader context. The Greek term for “church” is *ekklesia*. Borrowed from the secular world, it refers to those who have been “called out.” In every generation God has “called out” a people to reflect His will by lives of faithfulness, trust, love, and obedience.

**Read** Genesis 2:16–3:7. What test was given to Adam and Eve? Why would such a test be needed for perfect beings?

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In order to be able to love, Adam and Eve had to be created as morally free agents. They had to have the ability and the freedom to do wrong, even if they had no valid reason to do so. The test at the tree was a moral test: In what way would they use their God-given moral freedom?

We know the answer.

At the center of morality is law, God’s law, which defines good and evil for us (note that the tree is called the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”). What’s the purpose of a law that forbids lying, stealing, and killing if these beings were incapable of doing any of those things to begin with? The law itself would be meaningless in a universe of automatons—beings able to do only good. That’s not, however, how God chose to create us. He couldn’t—not if He wanted beings who could truly love.

Though after the Fall, Adam and Eve were to “pass the baton” to the next generation, humanity’s moral spiral downward was quick and dirty. Of their first two sons, only Abel chose to join God’s church, while Cain became possessed by the spirit of covetousness, lying, murder, and parental disrespect. Things went from bad to worse until evil overshadowed the good, and by the time of the Flood only Noah and his family could truly claim to be members of Christ’s church.

**How many times in the past 24 hours have you made moral choices, using the freedom given to us from Eden? What were those choices, and how much were they in harmony with God’s moral law?**

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## From Noah to Abraham *(Gen. 6:5–9)*

The world into which Noah was born was worse than any society that has ever existed, which means that it must have been pretty bad. With people living for almost a thousand years, it is not difficult to see how evil could become ingrained in society to the point that God became sorry that He ever created people to begin with!

**Read** Genesis 6 and then answer the following questions:

**1. How are we to understand the idea that God was “sorry” that He had created humanity? Why does this not mean that God had been unaware of what was going to happen? *(See Deut. 31:15–17.)***

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**2. Ellen G. White wrote that the designations “sons of God” and “daughters of men” refer to faithful men marrying unfaithful women. What lessons, then, can we learn from Genesis 6 about the church’s interaction with the world?**

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**3. What were some of the things that these people did that displeased God, and how do these things relate to His law?**

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**4. Look at the description of Noah in Genesis 6. What does the text say about him that helps us to understand the kind of man that he was, especially in such a corrupt world? At the same time, why did Noah need “grace” in the eyes of the Lord? What does this tell us about the relationship between faith and God’s law, even back then?**

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## From Abraham to Moses

After the Flood, it was the responsibility of Noah and his sons to share God's will with their descendants. Noah's family knew that global destruction had come to the world as a result of humanity's refusal to obey God's law, and having experienced God's grace, they could do something to help develop a more faithful generation. Unfortunately, not too long after the Flood, the inhabitants of the earth again rebelled (*Gen. 11:1–9*). "Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119.

**What** do Genesis 12 and 15:1–6 tell us, as well, about how law and grace work together?

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God called Abraham, a descendant of Shem, and made a covenant of blessing with him (*Gen. 12:1–3*). The Bible gives no criteria for God's call of Abraham. He does not appear to have had the righteous profile of Noah. In fact, soon after the call he proved himself to be cowardly and deceptive (*vss. 11–13*), violating God's law. Nevertheless, Abraham was a man of true faith, and by God's grace this faith was credited to him as righteousness. Although he was not perfect, he was willing to listen to the voice of God, even if it meant trusting God for things that seem all but impossible from a human standpoint.

Abraham was not alone among those who were willing to listen to God's voice and obey His commandments. Pharaoh, the two Abimelechs, and Joseph were well aware that God did not approve of adultery and lying. The second Abimelech even rebuked Isaac for exposing Abimelech's people to temptation (*Gen. 26:10*). Although God had chosen Abraham for a specific task, there were people in many different nations who feared Him. In fact, after Abraham and his military alliance had defeated Chedorlaomer and his coalition, Abraham was blessed by King Melchizedek, who was a "priest of the Most High God" (*Gen. 14:18, TEV*). This is more evidence that knowledge of God existed in the world at that time, even before the work and ministry of Moses.

## From Moses to Jesus

Though ancient law codes found in Egypt and Mesopotamia also provide evidence for a widespread knowledge of the principles and precepts found in God's law, none of them is complete. In fact, many of these codes also contain laws that promote idolatry and other practices that God later condemned. So, God chose a people to be the stewards of His true law. These people were the Hebrew nation, the descendants of Abraham and heirs to the covenant promise made to him many centuries earlier—a promise whose ultimate fulfillment was found only in Jesus.

**Read** Deuteronomy 7:6–12. How does this passage reveal the close relationship between law and grace?

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When God chose Israel to be the depository for His law, He knew that they were an imperfect people. Nonetheless, He entrusted them with the task of sharing His will with other imperfect people. The very designation “‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (*Exod. 19:6, NKJV*) shows that Israel was to be God's mediating priesthood for the entire world. Israel was the one chosen to bring the truth of God's will to the confused nations. And, despite Israel's mistakes, failures, and, at times, outright rebellion, it was still among these people that the Messiah came, lived, ministered, and died, fulfilling the covenant promise made to Abraham many centuries earlier.

**Read** Galatians 3:6–16. What does Paul write that helps to better clarify the true meaning of the covenant promise?

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Though many in ancient Israel understood the single noun form of “seed” to mean Israel as a single corporate entity, Paul here presents Jesus Himself, as the true and complete fulfillment of the covenant promise. So, the gospel itself, with its clear emphasis on both law and grace, most fully manifests and reveals the covenant.

**Think about all the long ages that passed from the time Abraham first received the covenant promise to the time of Christ. What does this tell us about the need for patience when it comes to trusting God?**

## From Jesus to the Remnant

Since Eden, God’s church has always been filled with fallible people. The very institution that was supposed to be a witness to God’s righteousness was itself in need of that same righteousness. As “the baton” passed from generation to generation, no runner was worthy enough to cross the finish line. None who received the law was able to reach its level of righteousness. Humanity, it appeared, was trapped in a wheel of futility in its quest for God’s approval.

However, when it seemed as if all hope was gone, God sent His Son “to receive the baton.” As the Second Adam, Jesus came to this earth without sin, and through constant devotion to His Father managed to maintain His obedience all the way to the Cross. With His resurrection, Jesus crossed the finish line, for He broke the chain of death. Now, through the power of the Spirit, the resurrected Christ shares His righteousness with every believer. This message, always the center of the covenant promise, was most clearly understood after Jesus completed His earthly ministry, and the New Testament church began.

Unfortunately, the Christian church—even with all this light—proved itself at times less faithful to the covenant than was ancient Israel, and deep apostasy soon took over almost everywhere. The Reformation, beginning in the sixteenth century, started to reverse this trend, but even it faltered, and many false doctrines and teachings have remained in the Christian world, including (as we have seen) wrong views about the role and purpose of the law in the life of New Covenant Christianity. God would call out a remnant people to restore many lost truths.

**Read** Revelation 12:17 and 14:6–12. How do these verses reveal both law and grace in God’s final warning message to the world?

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As we have seen, keeping “the commandments of God” is God’s appointed way of manifesting true love. In what ways, though, might we be outwardly keeping these commandments but not really manifesting love as we should? Why can’t we really be keeping the commandments if we don’t show love?

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**Further Study:** “The three angels of Revelation 14 represent the people who accept the light of God’s messages and go forth as His agents to sound the warning throughout the length and breadth of the earth. Christ declares to His followers: ‘Ye are the light of the world.’ Matthew 5:14. To every soul that accepts Jesus the cross of Calvary speaks: ‘Behold the worth of the soul: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” ’ Mark 16:15. Nothing is to be permitted to hinder this work. It is the all-important work for this time; it is to be far-reaching as eternity. The love that Jesus manifested for the souls of men in the sacrifice which He made for their redemption, will actuate all His followers.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 455, 456.

“The theme of greatest importance is the third angel’s message, embracing the messages of the first and second angels. All should understand the truths contained in these messages and demonstrate them in daily life, for this is essential to salvation. We shall have to study earnestly, prayerfully, in order to understand these grand truths; and our power to learn and comprehend will be taxed to the utmost.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 196.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Revelation 12:17 describes the “remnant” as those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. With the presence of hundreds of other Sabbath keeping Christian churches around the globe, what is the specific purpose of Seventh-day Adventism? What are we proclaiming and teaching that these other churches aren’t, even those who might be keeping the seventh-day Sabbath?
- 2 Read Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23, all in context. How do these verses help us understand salvation by faith?
- 3 Notice that in the first angel’s message, which begins with the “everlasting gospel,” there is also a proclamation that the “hour of his judgment has come.” So, the gospel, the law, and judgment all appear together in the three angels’ messages. How do we understand the role of the law and grace in judgment? How do they all fit together?

## Taking God at His Word

Austin's parents worked hard, but finances were difficult. The family had other problems, too, and felt little peace in their home. Then they met a Global Mission evangelist who shared the Bible with the family. Although the family had been Christians for years, this man taught a message they had never heard before. He visited the home and studied with Austin's mother. After the man left, she read the Bible passages for herself to be sure that what the man taught was true. She could find no error in the man's teachings. Convinced, she asked to be baptized and to become a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A year later, Austin's father also joined the Adventist Church.

"Our financial problems didn't clear up," Austin says. "But we had a peace we had never known before. We realized that no matter how big our problems are, God can carry us through."

The family moved to Mumbai, a large city in western India. Austin's father worked hard to support the family. Mother began tutoring neighborhood children to earn extra money. Joyfully, she tithed her meager earnings. Father worried that the family wouldn't have enough money to meet their needs if Mother tithed, but he saw that God blessed her faith, and more students wanted her tutoring services. Today she has more than 100 students, and Father has begun tutoring now. And he gladly returns God's tithe and his offerings.

When people ask the family why they don't tutor on Saturday, the family shares God's love through His commandments. There is no Adventist church in the area where the family lives, so they welcome those who wish to worship to their home on Sabbath. About 15 people regularly attend, ten of whom are baptized members.

Austin's parents have been strong examples of sharing God's love with others. His mother visits homes of those in need and shares what she can along with God's Word. Many people know the truth now because of her ministry. Austin and his brother also are sharing God's truth with teachers and fellow students and inviting them to worship in their home. "It's a great privilege to have a part in spreading the everlasting gospel," he says. "I'm grateful for the faithfulness of that Global Mission evangelist who first taught my parents God's truth. It's changed our lives forever."

Our mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission in the most spiritually needy places in the world. Thank you for sharing your mission offerings so that those like Austin's family can respond to God's message of love.

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AUSTIN NAVIS *and his parents share their faith in Mumbai, India.*

# Christ's Kingdom *and the Law*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 4:8, 9; Dan. 2:44; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Rev. 22:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:26.*

**Memory Text:** “‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (*Jeremiah 31:33, NKJV*).

In 2011 Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, died. He was 56. Years earlier, after a bout with cancer, Jobs called death “the single best invention of life” because it forced us to achieve the best we could here. In other words, because our time is so limited, we must try to be as successful as we can now.

Jobs, though, got it backward. What pushed him to seek a greater stake in this world, death (or at least the inevitability of it), should have been what revealed the futility of putting down roots too permanently here, in what’s always shallow ground. Sure, Jobs accomplished a lot, but in contrast to a million years or to eternity, what does it matter?

Indeed, we have been promised that this world and all that’s in it will be destroyed, and God will establish a new and eternal world where sin and death (all the result of the violation of God’s law) will never exist.

This week we’ll look at the question of God’s eternal kingdom and the role of the law in relation to it.

\* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.*

## The Kingdom of God

When God created the first human beings, He gave them dominion over all things. Adam was to rule the world. However, through violating God's law, he forfeited his right to earthly sovereignty, and ownership went to the archenemy, Satan. When the representatives from the other worlds gathered before God during the time of the patriarchs, it was Satan who appeared as the "delegate" from earth (*Job 1:6*).

**Read** Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 4:8, 9. What do these verses tell us about Satan's power in this world?

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What happened during the wilderness temptations is very revealing. Satan offered to give Jesus rulership over all the earthly kingdoms if Jesus would fall down and worship him (*Matt. 4:8, 9; see also Luke 4:5-7*). Jesus came to take the world back from Satan, but He could do so only at the cost of His life. How strong, then, the temptation must have been when Satan stood there and offered to give the world to Him! However, in bowing to Satan, He would have fallen into the same trap as had Adam and, consequently, would also have been guilty of violating His Father's law. Had He done so, the plan of salvation would have been aborted, and we'd be dead in our sins.

Of course, we know that Jesus stayed victorious, and, in His victory, we have the assurance and promise of our own, which is life in God's everlasting kingdom, the one depicted in Daniel 2, when the stone cut out without hands destroys all kingdoms of this world. And then, afterward, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*).

**All the kingdoms depicted in Daniel 2 did everything predicted about them, including the continued disunity in Europe, symbolized by the iron and clay in the toes of the statue. Why should these incredible facts help us trust in the promise of the last kingdom, the one that will "stand forever"?**

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## Citizens of the Kingdom

In many nations, those who move there from other countries have to surrender all allegiances to their land of birth if they want citizenship in their new country. However, some countries allow a person to hold dual citizenship; that is, they can pledge allegiance to both places.

There’s no such thing as dual citizenship, however, in the great controversy. We are on one side or the other. The kingdom of evil has been battling the kingdom of righteousness for millennia, and it is impossible for a person to be faithful to both at the same time. We all have to make a choice about whose kingdom will have our allegiance.

**Read 1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 11:13, Ephesians 2:12, Colossians 1:13, Deuteronomy 30:19, and Matthew 6:24. What do these texts tell us about the impossibility of “dual citizenship” in the great controversy between Christ and Satan? What role does keeping the law have in helping to show where our citizenship truly resides? See Rev. 14:12.**

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Once people make a decision to follow Christ, they have chosen to turn their back on the devil’s kingdom. He or she is now part of another commonwealth, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a result the person now obeys His rules, His law, His commandments, not those of the devil. The person’s obedience, however, isn’t universally appreciated—certainly not by the devil, who is anxious to get these people back, and often not by other people as well, who tend to distrust the “strangers and pilgrims” among them. Despite these obstacles, God has a people whose first allegiance is to Him, not to the “ruler of this world” (*John 12:31, NKJV*).

**So often foreigners in a country stand out because they are different. How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, as “strangers and pilgrims here,” stand out, as well? Or do we?**

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## Faith and the Law

The dominant theme in Scripture is simple: God is love. God's love is most potently demonstrated in His grace. With His unlimited power, He could easily have wiped humanity from the face of the earth, but instead He chose to exercise patience and give all a chance to experience the fullness of life in His eternal kingdom. Even more so, His love is revealed in the price that He Himself paid at the Cross.

God's love is also directly related to His justice. Having provided countless opportunities for people to choose their own destiny, the God of love will not force them into a kingdom that they have rejected. When the wicked stand before God's throne in the judgment, they are condemned by their own testimony. No one who stands before the throne can truthfully say that he was unaware of God's requirements. Whether through written or natural revelation, all have been exposed to the basic principles of the law of God (*Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:12–16*).

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Revelation 22:14, 15. Who gets into God's kingdom, who stays out, and why? What role does God's law play here? Also, notice the stark contrast between the two groups!**

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What's fascinating is that if you put 1 Corinthians 6:11 together with Revelation 22:14, you get faithful Christians who are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, they are "justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (*Rom. 3:28, NKJV*); yet, they also keep that law.

**"It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven: they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them."**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 18. **How do these words help us to understand better the painful topic about the fate of the lost?**

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## The Everlasting Kingdom

God created a perfect world. Sin entered, and that perfect world became severely marred. The story of redemption tells us that Jesus entered human history so that, among other things, the original perfection will be restored. The redeemed will live in a perfect world where love reigns supreme.

As we have seen, love can exist only in a moral universe, only in a universe with moral beings, and to be moral they must also be free. This prompts the question: could evil arise again?

**How** do Daniel 7:27, John 3:16, and Revelation 21:4 help to answer the question about whether evil will arise again? What is the significance of the term *everlasting*?

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When God created the universe, there were conditions attached to its stability. This is most evident in Genesis 2:17, where Adam was warned that violation of God's expressed command would result in death. The very mention of death indicates that the concept of eternity from a human perspective was conditional. Adam would have experienced eternal life only if he maintained loyalty to God.

However, in the re-created earth, death will no longer be a reality, which means that we will live forever, a fulfillment of the many promises of Scripture. Whether rebellion could occur is really a moot point. The fact is, it won't.

**Read** Jeremiah 31:31–34. What principle do we see here that helps us to understand why evil won't rise again?

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The Messianic kingdom will comprise people who maintained loyalty to God throughout their religious experience. In the face of persecution and personal struggles, they chose the path of obedience and demonstrated their willingness to live lives of divine service. God promises to inscribe His law in their hearts so that they will naturally do the things that are pleasing to Him. In the kingdom of Christ, sin is entirely vanquished, and righteousness reigns supreme.

## The Law in the Kingdom

Of all the harsh consequences of sin, death has been the most persistent. Sin can be overcome, Satan can be resisted, but with just two known exceptions (Enoch, Elijah) out of billions, who has escaped the inevitability of death? “When it comes to death,” wrote an ancient philosopher, “we human beings all live in an unwalled city.”

**What** message is found in Revelation 20:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:26?

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With the power ascribed to death, it is no wonder that just before Christ establishes the Messianic kingdom on earth, He will first utterly destroy death.

There is no question that death is related to sin, which means it's related to God's law, as well; because sin is violation of God's law. Consequently, there can be no sin without the law. Although sin is dependent on the law, the law is independent of sin. That is, the law can exist without sin. In fact, it did for all the ages until Lucifer rebelled in heaven.

“When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 109.

With this in mind, the absence of death and sin in the kingdom of God does not require the absence of the law. Just as the law of gravity is necessary for the harmonious interaction between the physical elements of the universe, God's moral law is needed to govern the righteous interaction between the saints. When God inscribes His law in the hearts of the redeemed, His sole purpose is to seal their decision to walk in the way of righteousness for eternity. Consequently, His law becomes the very essence of His kingdom. So we have every reason to believe that the principles of God's moral law will exist in God's eternal kingdom. The difference, of course, is that those principles will never be violated there as they have been here.

**Try to imagine the perfect environment of heaven: no fallen natures, no devil to tempt us, no sin, and no death. Now ask yourself: what things in your life and character would not fit very comfortably in such an environment?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pp. 307–319, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God’s commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God’s precepts. . . .

“The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God’s law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God’s commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ’s righteousness, they have a place at the King’s feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 314, 315.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Read the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s further study. In what ways are both law and grace revealed in it? Why is it crucial that we always understand them both together? What happens when these concepts are taught apart from each other?
- 2** The introduction to this week’s lesson talked about the late Steve Jobs and his claim that the specter of death, our own death, should drive us to accomplish all that we can here. Though there’s some truth to that idea, in and of itself it’s not enough. It never solves the problem of death itself and what death does to the meaning of the lives that precede it. In fact, after Jobs’ death, the cover of the *New Yorker* magazine depicted Peter, iPad in hand, checking Steve Jobs in at the pearly gates. Though that might be cute, what lesson can we learn from the fact that there probably won’t be any iPads, or anything that Steve Jobs created here, in heaven?
- 3** What things are on the earth now that will last forever? What won’t last past the final destruction of this world? Why is it crucial that we know the difference between them?

## A Place to Share

When Stephanie found life difficult in her public school in Denmark, her parents enrolled her in the local Seventh-day Adventist school. The family wasn't Adventist, but Stephanie quickly made friends and settled into her new school.

The school's religious teachings in Bible class seemed strange, but Stephanie's new friends talked to her about their faith, and she began to understand that the Adventist Church simply follows the Bible. Her friends invited her to Sabbath School and offered to take her to spend the entire day with them.

Stephanie found worship on Sabbath refreshing and vibrant. When she was 12, she gave her life to Christ. But her parents objected when she asked to be baptized. They wanted her to join their traditional church. Reluctantly, Stephanie attended her parents' church catechism classes, but her heart wasn't in it.

Stephanie was pleased when her parents allowed her to attend the Adventist boarding high school. The school provided a stable faith environment, and her friends and teachers became her family. Finally, when she was 17, Stephanie convinced her mother to give her permission to be baptized. "My friends and my teachers nurtured my faith and helped me grow strong."

Stephanie is now studying in a nearby university. She joined an Adventist café church, a church plant focused on reaching young people. The café church meets in the afternoon in the basement they share with a traditional Adventist congregation. About thirty young people attend worship each week. The youth-oriented congregation has formed small groups that meet for Bible study and prayer. They also hold social meetings with refreshments to attract community members. Anyone is invited.

During the town's yearly festival, the café church provides activities to draw young people to their booth. "We serve homemade waffles, offer a bouncing castle for some fun, and have short singing times during which we invite visitors to come to the café church on Sabbath afternoon. And we get many interests," Stephanie adds.

While interest in religion in postmodern and secular Denmark is fading, outreach programs such as café churches and international church congregations are drawing those wanting to know who God is.

Our mission offerings help to fund Adventist schools such as the ones Stephanie attended, where she met her Savior. Recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped support outreach in Denmark by providing less traditional worship services such as the café church for young adults and international churches that attract guest workers and international students who come to the country seeking a vibrant worship experience. Thank you for helping revive the Adventist Church in Denmark.

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STEPHANIE BEHRENDT *shares her faith in Denmark.*

During the third quarter guide of 2014, *The Teachings of Jesus* by Carlos Steger, we will study some of Jesus' main teachings as found in the Gospels. Our Savior taught many things pertaining to our spiritual and practical lives. He presented His teachings to different audiences, carefully adapting His method to each person. Sometimes He preached a sermon; other times He dialogued with individuals or groups. Sometimes He spoke openly; other times He concealed the meaning of His words. In each case, He taught truth about God and salvation.

When we open the Scriptures next quarter and read Jesus' words, let us picture ourselves among His attentive listeners at the mountainside, by the sea, or in the synagogue. Let us pray for spiritual discernment to understand His message and to grasp His unfathomable love manifested on the cross. And as we hear His voice calling us to follow Him, let us renew our commitment to walk daily with Him by faith and in obedience. The more time we spend at His feet, the more we will say, as did the two disciples of Emmaus: " 'Did not our heart burn within us . . . while He opened the Scriptures to us?' " (*Luke 24:32, NKJV*).

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## Lesson 1—Our Loving Heavenly Father

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Our Father in Heaven** (*Isa. 63:16, 64:8*)

MONDAY: **Revealed by the Son** (*John 14:8–10*)

TUESDAY: **The Love of Our Heavenly Father** (*Jer. 31:3*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Compassionate Care of Our Heavenly Father** (*Matt. 6:25–34*)

THURSDAY: **The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit** (*John 17:4*)

**Memory Text**—*1 John 3:1*

**Sabbath Gem:** A father provides love, protection, security, sustenance, and identity for a family. We can enjoy these and many other benefits when we accept God as our Heavenly Father.

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## Lesson 2—The Son

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Son of Man** (*Matt. 24:30*)

MONDAY: **The Son of God** (*Matt. 3:17*)

TUESDAY: **Christ's Divine Nature: Part 1** (*Luke 5:17–26, John 5:18*)

WEDNESDAY: **Christ's Divine Nature: Part 2** (*John 5:21, John 11:25*)

THURSDAY: **Christ's Mission** (*Luke 19:10*)

**Memory Text**—*Mark 10:45*

**Sabbath Gem:** Everyone has to decide, individually, who Jesus is. The destiny of every human being hangs on his or her response to this question.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.