

Christ and His Law

Christ, the End of the Law

Lesson #7 for May 17, 2014

Scriptures: Romans 5:12-21; 6:15-23; 7:13-25; 9:30-10:4; Galatians 3:19-24.

1. In this lesson we will learn what the relationship is between the plan of salvation and the law of God.

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." (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for May 10, 2014.)

2. If we are saved only by faith in Jesus Christ, (Acts 16:31) then what is the role of law? Remember that faith is a friendly relationship with God. As we noted last week, breaking one of the commands of God leads to death. No amount of careful law-keeping can atone for or rectify the fact that we are sinners. However, as human beings, we need laws to guide us in our daily activities. The law has several important functions that we need to discuss. What is the relationship between law and grace?
3. Read Romans 5:12-21. These verses present a very simple and straightforward discussion of the problem of sin and the plan of salvation. Through Adam and Eve, sin entered the human race. According to Genesis 2:16-17, they should have died right then. But, instead of allowing them to die on the spot, God gave them a temporary extension of life so they might have opportunity to learn the truth and return to their loyalty to God.
4. Satan had claimed that once Adam and Eve sinned, the entire human race belonged to him. He claimed to be the king of this world. He claimed that no human being could live a sinless life on this earth and thus be saved. But, when Jesus came, He proved that Satan was wrong. He proved that sin does lead to death and that Satan had been lying about God's original statement in Genesis 2. (See Genesis 3:1-5.)
5. When the children of Israel were led out of Egypt having been slaves for many years, God thought it was appropriate to give them a number of laws including the Ten Commandments. As a result of this more detailed giving of the law, sin seemed to abound. It might have seemed that the human race was hopeless because we were drowning in sin.
6. Ellen White wrote some very interesting statements about the giving of the law and even why it was given.

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.—*The Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1878; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 230. [Compare Genesis 26:5]

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for

the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 364.2) (Compare *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 299.2-300.0 (1864); *1SP* 264.2-265.1; *The Signs of the Times* June, 17, 1880 par. 2,3; *PH 064* p. 19 (1875); *SR* 148.3.)

7. Following the giving of the law, it was natural for human beings to get the general impression that just keeping that law would result in salvation. Many of the prophets rejected that idea in various ways. Isaiah, one of the major prophets, said:

Isaiah 59:2 (GNB): ² It is because of your sins that he doesn't hear you. It is your sins that separate you from God when you try to worship him.

8. If disobedience and sin separate us from God, what should be the answer to that problem? Clearly, it should be a coming back to God. In fact, Romans 14:23 which is the most basic and fundamental definition of *sin* says, "Anything that is not based on faith is sin." (GNB)
9. As a result, we have a choice. We can either: 1) Continue to live our sinful, selfish lives, doing whatever we feel like doing, and we will die the second death that Jesus died at the end of His human life; or, 2) Look at His life and come to admire Him; and through a careful study of that life through the Scriptures and communication with Him through prayer and sharing what we have learned with others, we can develop a lasting faith relationship with Him that will bring salvation.
10. If in our pursuit of understanding God and becoming more and more like Jesus these processes are actually working and God is working in our lives to change our ways of thinking and acting, how could that possibly be an excuse to go on sinning?
11. Read Romans 6:15-23. How can we know that this has happened in our lives? What is the ongoing relationship between law and grace? It is God's plan that we be set free from sin by obedience to the law. Unfortunately, we learn by hard experience that we cannot keep the law through our own power. The only successful way to keep the law is to study the life of Christ and seek to follow His example. As we think about Him and come to appreciate all He has accomplished, we find ourselves coming to love Him more each day. We want to be like Him; by beholding we become changed. (*Great Controversy* 555)
12. Our salvation comes from our new relationship with Jesus Christ—a relationship called faith; but, as we become more and more like Him, it will certainly not set us "free" to break His law!

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. The Son of God had died as their sacrifice and had ascended to heaven to stand before the Father as their advocate. By repentance and faith they might be freed from the condemnation of sin and through the grace of Christ be enabled henceforth to render obedience to the law of God. (*Acts of the Apostles* 393.1)

13. Let us say unequivocally that we are not saved by keeping the law. There are two reasons for this: 1) We can never keep it perfectly, and 2) Law-keeping was never intended to be and cannot be a way to salvation. More than that, in our natural human selfishness, we enjoy sinning! Perhaps, the best understanding of Romans 10:4 was given by J. B. Phillips in his paraphrase of the New Testament:

Romans 10:4 (Phillips): For Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness-by-the-Law for everyone who believes in him.

14. But, Paul having been a Pharisee of the Pharisees still struggled with sin and law-keeping. No doubt, before his conversion, Paul would have responded just as the rich, young ruler did in Matthew 19:20; Mark 10:20; and Luke 18:21 by saying: "Ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments." (GNB)
15. Read Romans 7:21-25. What time period was Paul talking about as he discussed the struggle to do what is right? Theologians have wrestled with this question for centuries. Is this before conversion? During the conversion process? Or, after conversion? Satan never stops working. The more we move away from following him, the harder he works. So, the best answer is probably all three. Satan will do whatever he can to prevent us from coming back to Christ in a faith relationship. This is a life-and-death issue for him. He will suggest all kinds of subtle temptations to us as he did to Jesus as recorded in Matthew 4. But, God has provided a way around all of those problems. A continual focus on the life and death of Jesus Christ with the daily desire to understand it more fully will turn our attention away from the tempter to the Man of our salvation.
16. The *King James Version* of Romans 10:4 says, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." Many have taken this verse along with Romans 6:14 to mean that we do not need the law any more; Christ has made it obsolete. Of course, that goes against many other passages in the writings of Paul. Consider Romans 3:31, *GNB*: "Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the Law? No, not at all; instead, we uphold the Law."
17. We must admit that the Pharisees and other Jews certainly worked hard at keeping the law. But, Romans 2 tells us that their attempts at salvation by keeping the law were a monumental failure! Their human efforts at keeping the law could never bring salvation. But, it is always easier to take a very literal reading of the Ten Commandments and try to suggest the we have not broken any of them on a given day instead of accepting the true plan of salvation which is to study the life Christ and try to be more like Him every day. Christ will become our salvation if we allow Him through the work of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives each day.
18. Read Galatians 3:19-24. These verses have been a continual challenge for theologians as well. Galatians 3:24 tells us: "And so the Law was in charge of us until Christ came, in order that we might then be put right with God through faith." What are the implications of those words? The Greek word *paidogagos* refers to a trusted slave who was put in charge of the son of a wealthy Greek or Roman family. It was this mentor-disciplinarian who was to make sure that the son learned how he was supposed to live his life, went to school, and studied his lessons, while at the same time protecting him from kidnappers, etc. The Greek of Galatians 3:24 can be translated, "Until Christ came" or "To bring us to Christ." The law is supposed to do both. In our times of ignorance, the law points a finger at the kind of behavior which is acceptable to God and which preserves our lives. Thus, the law serves as a kind of disciplinarian but also a protection for those who take it seriously.

"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be

justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). In this scripture, the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law [The Ten Commandments]. 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.

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234.5-235.2. [Words in brackets are supplied.]

19. How should we relate to fellow Christians who want to focus on law-keeping as a way to attain perfection? Is it possible to be perfect in this life? The word *perfection* in biblical Greek means to be mature or grown up. It is possible through an ever closer relationship with Jesus Christ. But, the focus must never be on law-keeping. It must always be on Christ. We still need the law because there will always be times when Satan will trip us up and get us to fall into sin. When we are tempted to do such things, we have a chance to be warned and to avoid those traps by remembering the guidance of the law.
20. In the ancient Jewish tabernacle system, people took lambs to the gate of the tabernacle or tent and sacrificed them, symbolically transferring their sins through the lamb’s blood into the tabernacle. At the end of the year on the great Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* as described in Leviticus 16, those sins were symbolically carried out of the tabernacle, placed on the head of the scapegoat, and carried far away into the wilderness. That was a very concrete illustration of the fact that God has a way of dealing with our sins. The ultimate plan is simply to separate us from our sins.
21. Once again, remember Romans 14:23. It tells us that the closer we come to God, the further we are from sin and *vice versa*. While Jesus offers to forgive our sins, that was never intended to be an excuse to go out and do them again! Every time we sin, it scars us. Wouldn’t it be better to turn to Jesus, asking for His healing touch and giving the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work in our lives to take us out of this sin-death spiral?

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