

The Law and the Gospel



SABBATH—DECEMBER 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 19:7, 8; Exodus 23:1–9; 1 John 5:3; Romans 3:19, 20; Exodus 20:11, 12; Deuteronomy 5:15.

MEMORY VERSE: “We know that we have come to know God if we obey his commands. Suppose someone says, ‘I know him.’ But suppose that person does not do what God commands. Then that person is a liar and is not telling the truth” (1 John 2:3, 4, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: God’s law is what shows us our sin. It points to our need for a Savior. So, the law and the gospel cannot be separated.

THE LAW AND CHARACTER (WHO GOD IS) OF GOD ARE INVOLVED IN THE GREAT CONTROVERSY (WAR). When the controversy is finally over, God’s law and character will be cleared as just (right) and true among all the universe. Until then, the controversy goes on. As humans we end up on one side or another. And the side we choose decides which master we follow. Bob Dylan, a famous singer, once sang, “You’re [You are] gonna have to serve somebody, / Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord / But you’re [you are] gonna have to serve somebody.”—(“Gotta Serve Somebody” [repeated chorus]).

Those who choose to serve the Lord do so out of love for what God has done for them through Christ. They have been buried with Christ by baptism into His death. Because of this, they know that the body of sin was destroyed. They no longer need to serve their former master, sin. And now they have been given the freedom to obey God and His law.

In this week’s lesson we will study the law and its purpose. We also will understand how the law is connected with the good news of God’s saving grace.¹ In other words God’s law helps to show just what God’s grace has offered us in Christ.

1. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 2**GOD’S LAWS AND RULES
(Psalm 19:7, 8)**

The word *torah* is a Hebrew word commonly used in the Old Testament. It is often translated as “law.” The New Testament uses the Greek, *nomos* (law), to translate *torah*. But *torah* can also mean “direction” or “guidance.” The Bible is a record of God’s relationship with humans. For this reason, *law* in the Bible means all of God’s instructions to His people. God Himself is good and righteous (holy). He guides and instructs His people in goodness and righteousness (holiness). For this reason His law shows His goodness and righteousness. In other words, God’s law is a reflection (mirror) of His character (who God is).

What do Psalm 19:7, 8; Romans 7:12; and Psalm 119:151, 152, 172 tell us about the law and about God?

The Bible teaches that God has clearly shown Himself to humans. As a person reads through the Holy Bible, he or she comes to know plenty of materials that give instructions about many parts of human life. They may be rules about Christian living, health, sexuality, diet, work, and so on. Some of these instructions apply to all people. Others appear to be more limited in time and space. All of them are God’s instructions (*torah*). So we need to be careful about developing principles (important rules) that help

us to understand what is meant for all people and what is not. Seventh-day Adventists and many other Christian groups take special note of differences between (1) “ceremonial” laws (rules that teach the plan of salvation by symbols [examples] and practices), (2) “civil” laws (instructions about the community life of the nation of old-time Israel), and (3) “moral” laws (instructions for how God wants humans to live).

The book of Leviticus contains many ceremonial laws, many of which are for the sanctuary (house of God) service and its system. Civil laws about the principle of justice can be found in Exodus 23:1–9. Then there is the moral law, the Ten Commandments, which most Christians believe are still God’s law for all humans.

Look through Exodus 23:1–9. What moral (righteous) principles can we learn from what was given to Israel in Old Testament times?



God’s law mirrors His character.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 3**THE LAW TODAY FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE (Genesis 35:1–4)**

Most Christians claim that the Ten Commandments are God's law for the universe. In the United States, many legal battles have been fought over the right of Christians to put the Ten Commandments in different public places, such as public schools. Years ago, Alabama was involved in a legal battle with a state judge who refused to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from a courtroom. He refused although he was ordered by a higher court to do so. To many people, the Ten Commandments are still God's law for living a moral (right) Christian life.

And with good reason too. First, the Ten Commandments were written by God at Sinai. But the book of Genesis suggests that most of the commandments were known before then.

What do Genesis 35:1–4; Genesis 2:3, 4; Genesis 4:8–11; Genesis 39:7–9; Genesis 44:8; and Genesis 12:18 show about the fact that the law existed before Mount Sinai?

It really makes no sense for the Ten Commandments to be only for the Jewish people at a certain time and place. In the same way, does it not make sense that such laws for stealing, killing, adultery (sex outside of marriage), and idolatry (worshiping false gods) are all wrong, no matter what the culture is? Also, the

Bible shows very clearly that the law explains what sin is very well (Romans 7:7). So, the idea about the law being removed is very foolish to any Bible-believing Christian.

How does James 2:11 help us to understand that God's law is valid (good) from eternity to eternity?

First John 5:3 says that obeying God's commandments is showing our love for Him. What does that mean? Why is obeying the commandments showing this love?



The Ten Commandments were written by God at Sinai.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 4**THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL (Romans 3:19, 20)**

Many people do understand that the Ten Commandments have authority and power over the lives of

Christians. But the part that the Ten Commandments have in the plan of salvation can get confusing. Some ask, if we are not saved by the keeping of the law, then what is the purpose of keeping it?

How do Romans 3:19, 20; Psalm 119:5, 6; and Romans 7:7 help us to understand what part the law has in the lives of those who are saved by grace?

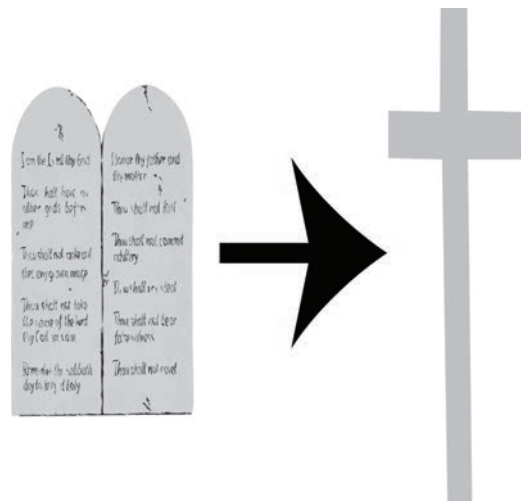
The law was never meant to save us. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the law helps the sinner to see a need for the grace (gospel) of Christ. By pointing out what is right, what is good, and what is true, all of us sinners who fail to meet God's standard understand our need of salvation. The law shows us the need for the gospel, the need for grace. This grace comes to us through Jesus. The duty of the law, even in the Old Testament, was to show us our need of salvation. The law was never supposed to offer salvation.

"To ask whether the law can bring salvation is to ask the wrong question of the Bible, both of the Old and New Testaments! The Bible, too, never suggests nor even hints that this might ever have happened. . . .

"It also is wrong to argue that the writer of Hebrews 10:1–4 corrected the law by saying that it had taught that 'the blood of bulls and goats [could] take away sins.' . . . The sacrifices were pictures, examples, and models of the one perfect sacrifice (Jesus') that was to come."—Adapted from Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Five Views on Law and*

Gospel (Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), pages 394, 395.

Look around and see what breaking God's law has done to all people. How has your own life been influenced by breaking God's law? What does your answer tell you about how much we still need the law?



The law points us to the need for the gospel and grace.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 5

THE SABBATH AND THE LAW (Exodus 20:11)

As we studied on Monday, many Christians still believe that God's law is still standing. Again, as long as one accepts that sin is real, then it is hard to understand how anyone could believe that the law is no longer needed.

But we know very well that the Christian responsibility for the law suddenly gets very "muddy." This is true when we talk about obeying

the fourth commandment, especially the seventh day itself. The Alabama judge got himself in trouble for not removing the Ten Commandments monument from the courtroom. But he himself was breaking that law, because he was not keeping the Bible commandment to rest on the seventh day. James says, “Suppose you keep the whole law but trip [stumble] over just one part of it. Then you are guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10, NIV). So really, the judge was guilty of breaking every part of the law that he wanted to keep in the courthouse!

Exodus 20:9, 10 explains the Sabbath commandment. The verses are careful to explain that when the Sabbath (the seventh day) comes, all kinds of work are to be stopped by everyone who lives in one’s home. In this way its holiness is to be guarded. “The Sabbath is not pictured as a day of rest and getting well for those too weak to keep working day after day without rest. Instead, it is pictured as good for everyone, for the purpose of keeping God’s day holy. In this way, people can enjoy God’s full blessings of that day.”—Adapted from Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary, Exodus*, volume 2 (Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), page 460.

The spiritual fullness of the Sabbath is included in what it symbolizes (stands for). What do Exodus 20:11, 12; Deuteronomy

5:15; Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:20; and Hebrews 4:3–9 tell us about the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath? How has your own experience with the Sabbath helped you to better enjoy what these verses teach us?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 6

THE SABBATH AND THE GOSPEL (Colossians 1:14–16)

In the last question of yesterday’s daily study, we looked at both Exodus 20:11, 12 and Deuteronomy 5:15. What we understand here is that the Sabbath points us toward two ideas: Creation and Redemption.² These two ideas are very powerfully connected in the Bible. God is our Creator, and He is also our Redeemer.³ Both of these important spiritual truths are taught to us every week, on every seventh day, as we rest on the Sabbath, “according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56, NKJV). It is just the same with the women who “had come with Him [Jesus] from Galilee” (Luke 23:55, NKJV).

Read Colossians 1:14–16 and John 1:1–14. How do these verses connect Jesus as both our Creator and Redeemer?

“God’s law is as holy as God Himself. So, only one equal with God could make payment for its sin. None but Christ could redeem [save] fallen [sinful] human beings from the curse

2. Redemption—salvation purchased for a price; for example, Jesus paid a heavy price (that of great suffering) on the cross to save us from sin.

3. Redeemer—a person (in this case, Jesus) who paid the price for our sins.

of the law, and bring them again into peace with Heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, page 42. Jesus was the only One as Creator, as One equal with God, and as the One who had made “all . . . that was made” (John 1:3, NKJV), who could redeem fallen sinners.

By pointing us to Christ as our Creator and Redeemer, the Sabbath is a powerful symbol of the gospel of grace. Our resting on the Sabbath shows that we are not saved by the works of the law but by what Christ has done for us. So Sabbath rest becomes a symbol of the rest we have in Jesus (read Hebrews 4:3–9).

Salvation, too, is restoration.⁴ It is re-creation. This starts now when we accept Jesus (read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15) and continues until the re-creation of the heavens and the earth (read Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:5). These verses show even more clearly how Creation and Redemption are joined together. And both these important truths are included in the Sabbath commandment, which is one of the Ten Commandments.

It is one thing to say that you are a Sabbath keeper, and to even rest on the Sabbath. The scribes and Pharisees⁵ did that. But it is another thing to experience the fullness and richness of the Sabbath. What about your own Sabbath keeping? What might you do in order to better enjoy the full spiritual and physical blessings that God gives us on the Sabbath day?

4. restoration—bringing sinners back to their original condition (state), as if they had never sinned before.

5. Pharisees—members of a religious group in Jesus’ day who believed you could be saved by keeping the law.



The Sabbath points to Christ as our Creator and Redeemer.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, pages 140–146, in *A Solemn [Serious] Appeal [Plea]*; and “God’s Law Immutable [Not Changing],” pages 433–450, in *The Great Controversy*.

“God would have us understand that He has a right to mind, soul, body, and spirit—to all that we own. We are His by creation and by redemption. As our Creator, Jesus claims our entire service. As our Redeemer, Jesus has a claim of love as well as of a right—of love without any equal. . . . Our bodies, our souls, our lives, are His. This is because they are His free gift, and because He continuously gives us His gifts, and gives us strength to use our minds.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, page 245.

“Do not work on the Sabbath day. Do not do just anything you want to

on my holy day. Make the Sabbath a day you can enjoy. Honor my holy day. . . . Then you will find your joy in me' (Isaiah 58:13, 14, NIrV). To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ's creative and redeeming [saving] power, it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, the Sabbath keepers delight themselves in Him. The Sabbath shows them that the works of creation are proof of His strong power in redemption. While the Sabbath reminds us of the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored [made new] through the Savior. And every living thing in nature reminds us of Jesus' invitation, 'Come to [M]e, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28, NIrV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 289.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Jeremiah 31:33, NIrV, reads, “This is the covenant⁶ I will make with Is-

rael after that time,' announces the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people.' ” Some people try to use this verse to show that the law (or, really, the seventh-day Sabbath) has been removed from the new covenant. What is wrong with that reason? In fact, in what ways does this verse support the Seventh-day Adventist position about the law, including the Sabbath?

❷ We do believe that the law, including the Sabbath, should be kept. But why must we be careful about falling into the trap of legalism?⁷ In class, talk about what legalism is and how we can avoid it.

❸ Think about the part of the law in the great controversy. In his attack on God's law, why has Satan chosen the Sabbath commandment for special attention? Why was that such a “brilliant” move on his part?

6. covenant—promise or agreement between God and His people. In the Bible, there are two covenants. One is called the old covenant, and the other is the new, or everlasting, covenant.

7. legalism—the belief that you can be saved by your own good works and keeping the law.