

Love Does Everything the Law Commands



SABBATH—MARCH 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 20:1–17; Romans 6:1–3; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Matthew 23:23, 24; James 2:1–9.

MEMORY VERSE: “Do not owe people anything. But you will always owe love to each other. The person who loves others has obeyed all the law” (Romans 13:8, ICB).



Romans 13:8 tells us that when we love the people around us who need our help, we do everything the law commands us to do.

A LOCAL CHURCH held a special meeting to talk about what they should do about a member who was making trouble. One person at the meeting told the pastor, “We can’t make decisions because of mercy.” We can’t? The pastor wondered what this person understood about God and His law. Mercy must be an important part of how we fix problems with people when they make mistakes. Mercy is a part of love. Romans 13:8 tells us that when we love the people around us who need our help, we do everything the law commands us to do.

If love obeys the law, we should be careful not to think that the law is separate from love. Love is not separate from the law in any way. In the Bible, the two agree. God, who gave us His law, is love. So, God’s law is the law of love. As Ellen G. White puts it, the law shows us who God is. (Read *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 305, adapted.)

God’s law is not a set of important rules that doesn’t mean anything for our lives. More than anything, God’s law shows us His love for us.

THE LAW OF LOVE (Exodus 20:1–17)

God's law is more than important rules. God's law shows us a relationship. We see this relationship very clearly in the Ten Commandments. The basic rules of the Ten Commandments were already part of Adam and Eve's lives in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. The rules of God's law are rules of love. They show us the relationship that God wanted to have with people. The rules also show us the relationship God wanted us to have with other people.

The Lord wrote the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) on stone (Exodus 31:18). The commandments show Israel their special relationship with God. God wrote His commandments down after He saved His people from Egypt. The commandments showed God's love and His promises to His people (read Exodus 6:7, 8 and Leviticus 26:12). One can see that the first four commandments and the last six show us what a healthy relationship with God and other people should be.

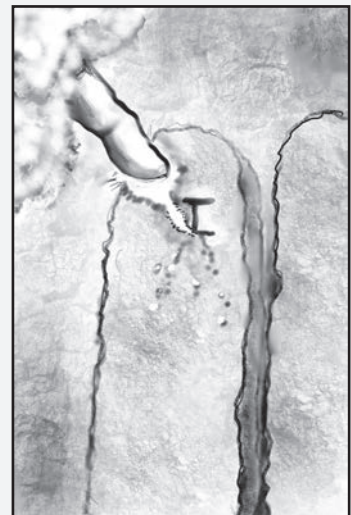
Read Exodus 20:1–17. How do these verses show us two important rules: (1) love for God and (2) love for people?

The first four commandments show our relationship with God. The last six show our relationships with other people. Both our relationship to God and to other people must be under the control of these two parts of God's law.

Jesus connected the two parts of God's law together. Jesus taught that there are two important commandments: (1) " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul [spirit], and all your mind' " (Matthew 22:37, ERV; compare with Deuteronomy 6:5). And (2) " 'Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself' " (Matthew 22:39, ERV; compare with Leviticus 19:18).

The first four commandments are the ways we must love God with all our heart, mind, spirit, and body. The last six are the ways we must love other people. We must love them the same as we love ourselves. Jesus says that these two love commandments are an important part of the law (Matthew 22:40). So, love is the foundation for the whole law of God. We often hear people say, "We don't need to keep the law. We just need to love God and people." Why is this idea false?

Can we show love for God or people if we break His law? Explain your answer.



One can see that the first four commandments and the last six show us what a healthy relationship with God and other people should be.

THE LAW IS HOLY (Romans 6:1–3)

Love is the beginning of God's law. When God supports the law, He supports love. That is why Jesus died to save sinners. Jesus died so that He could support the law at the same time that He showed us mercy. In this way, Jesus could be both fair and show mercy to everyone who believes in Him (Romans 3:25, 26). When God saves us, He shows His support for His law. So, the law doesn't stop being important when God saves us.

Read Romans 6:1–3 and then Romans 7:7–12. Pay careful attention to verse 12. What do these verses tell us about the law, even after Jesus died?

Some people think that mercy and God's saving plan make us free from keeping the law. But Paul says that we must not keep sinning so that God will give us more mercy. The ones who believe in Jesus have been baptized into His death. So they must stop sinning and live in Jesus.

The law of God isn't sin. The law of God shows us our sin and shows us that we are evil without Jesus. "So the law is holy. And what the law says is holy and right and good" (Romans 7:12, WE). The law also shows us our need for God to save us and for His mercy. God's saving mercy comes only from Jesus. So, "does this mean that we do away with the Law when we put our trust in Christ? No, not at all. It means we know the Law is important" (Romans 3:31, NLV).

Jesus didn't come to destroy the law. He came to keep everything that the Law and the Old Testament promised. That's why Jesus says, "I tell you the truth. Nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. The law will not lose even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter until all has happened" (Matthew 5:18, ICB).

God's law shows us that He is holy. The law also shows us that God is love, that He is good, and that He is the truth (Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 19:7, 8; Psalm 119:142, 172). We must remember that God wrote the Ten Commandments on pieces of stone Himself (Exodus 31:18). The law written in stone shows us that God and His government don't change. Love is the foundation or beginning of His government. This Bible truth is an important idea in the worldwide war between God and Satan.



Jesus died so that He could support the law at the same time that He showed us mercy.

LAW AND MERCY (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

As we saw already, God’s law and His mercy work together, not against each other. Both rules and forgiveness work together with God’s love. Both the law and mercy show that God is fair. During Old Testament times, God’s people saw that His law showed His mercy. The “gods” of the non-Jews didn’t show their followers what they wanted from them. But the God of the Bible teaches His people about the things that please Him. What pleases God? He wants the best for all of His people.

We must remember that the law can’t save us from sin. The law can’t change human hearts. Because we are sinners, we need God to remove our old evil heart. Then we need Him to give us a new spiritual heart.

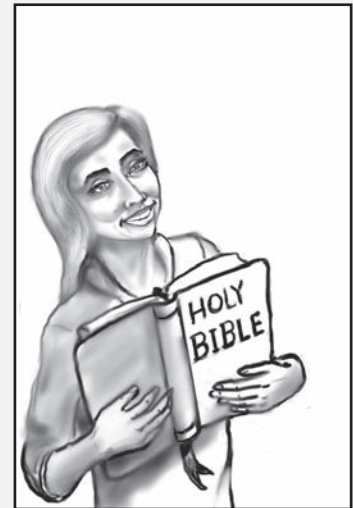
Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What do these verses teach us about God’s promises to give us a new heart? Compare this promise with Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:1–21 about being born again. Also read Hebrews 8:10.

God wrote the Ten Commandments on pieces of stone (Exodus 31:18). But God also writes His law in the hearts of His people (Psalm 37:30, 31). God’s law of love is not something that is outside of us. It is part of our hearts and every part of who we are. God is the only One who can write His law on our hearts. He promised His chosen people that He would write it there for them (read Hebrews 8:10).

We can’t save ourselves with our law-keeping. God saves us because of faith in His mercy. We don’t save ourselves. God’s saving mercy is His gift to us (Ephesians 2:8). We don’t keep the law so that God will save us. We keep the law because we already are saved. We don’t keep the law so that God will love us. We keep the law because God already loves us. God’s love for us helps us to love Him and other people (read John 14:15).

At the same time, the law shows us our sin (James 1:22–25; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7). The law also shows us our need of a Savior (Galatians 3:22–24). The law leads us in the best ways of life and shows us God’s love, too.

What is your hope when God judges you? Is it your law-keeping? Or is it Jesus’ gift of mercy and holy life? What does your answer tell you about what God’s law can and can’t do for you?



God also writes His law in the hearts of His people (Psalm 37:30, 31).

LOVE KEEPS THE WHOLE LAW (Matthew 23:23, 24)

The relationship between love and the law is very important. The Bible tells us that when we love, we keep the whole law.

In Romans 13:8–10, Paul teaches us that “the person who loves others has obeyed all the law” (Romans 13:8, ICB). After Paul talks about the last six commandments, he announces, “All these commands and all other commands are really only one rule: ‘Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself’ ” (Romans 13:9, ERV). Paul teaches that “love doesn’t hurt others. So loving is the same as obeying all the law” (Romans 13:10, ERV). What type of love obeys all the law? What does this love look the same as?

Read Matthew 23:23, 24. As we already learned in last week’s lesson, what are “the really important teachings of the law” that Jesus talks about in verse 23? Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15 and Isaiah 58:13, 14. How do these verses show us the connection between the law and God’s plan to save us?



After Paul talks about the last six commandments, he announces, “All these commands and all other commands are really only one rule: ‘Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself’ ” (Romans 13:9, ERV).

Jesus says that “the really important teachings of the law” are being fair, showing mercy, and faith. One law, more than any other law, shows us that God’s wish to save us also is connected with His being fair. That law is the Sabbath. The Sabbath helps us remember the time when God made the skies and the earth. The Sabbath also helps us remember that God makes His people free from sin and slavery. The Lord wants us to feel joy for the Sabbath and in Him (Isaiah 58:13, 14). Isaiah 58 also talks about doing loving works to help other people. God wants us to feed the hungry and welcome people with no homes into our houses (read Isaiah 58:3–10).

All these teachings (and many other teachings) help us to understand what keeping the law really means. When we don’t break the law, we keep it. But we also must do good. We must do works of love that show God’s faith and mercy. Keeping the law is about more than not breaking the law. Keeping the law means doing good works.

ABOVE ALL, LOVE PEOPLE (James 2:1–9)

If loving God means we keep His whole law, then we can't fully keep God's law when we only stop doing bad things, right? The law of love commands us not to do evil. The law of love also causes us to do acts that show God's love to other people. We must show God's love to other church members and to people outside the church in our communities. The people on the earth really need to see God's love.

Read James 2:1–9. What important message do these verses give us?

James teaches us that the rich must not hurt the poor or make life hard for them. Then James talks about the law of love for our neighbors. He says, "If you obey this law, you are doing right" (James 2:8, ERV).

As Ellen G. White says, "When we love people, we show God's love on this earth. Jesus is the King of glory. He came to put this love in our hearts. This love makes us children of one family. Jesus said, 'Love each other as I have loved you' (John 15:12 [ERV]. When we love people the way that Jesus loved them, His work for us is done. We are ready for heaven. We have heaven in our hearts."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 641, adapted.

When we love people as Jesus loved them, we will be ready for heaven! Wow! This thought is very powerful. It shows us what it means to really be Jesus' followers.

Jesus commands His followers to " 'love each other just as I loved you' " (John 13:34, ERV). Jesus also says, " 'All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other' " (John 13:35, ERV). Love is so important to our Christian faith because God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). If we say we love God, we will also love other people (compare with 1 John 3:11; 1 John 4:20, 21).

1 Peter 4:8 tells Christians, "Most important of all, love each other deeply, because love makes you willing to forgive many sins" (ERV; also read Hebrews 10:24 and 1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Think more about the idea that we must love people the way that Jesus loved them. How does this teaching help us better understand the idea that God will make us fit for heaven in this life? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



“When we love people as Jesus loved them, we will be ready for heaven!”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “‘The Least of These My Brethren,’” pages 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“When we serve other people and help them, Jesus helps us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. People who help other people will drink the living water and be filled. They will avoid exciting entertainment. They will not wait for some change to happen in their lives. The most important topic that interests them is how to save people who are ready to die. Then their friendships with other people will cause wonderful things to happen. The Savior’s love will cause hearts to join together as one in peace and agreement.

“When we understand that we are workers together with God, we will say God’s promises with meaning and interest. God’s promises will burn in our hearts and on our lips. God asked Moses to serve people who fight against God and don’t know Him. God gave Moses this promise: ‘I myself will go with you. And I will give you victory [success].’ Exodus 33:14 [ICB]. The Lord also said, ‘I will be with you.’ Exodus 3:12 [ICB]. God makes these promises to everyone who serves Jesus and seeks to help His poor, suffering people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 641, adapted.



The Savior’s love will cause hearts to join together as one in peace and agreement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. How does 1 Corinthians 13 help us understand who we should be as Christians?
- ② What separates the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25:31–46? How can we make sure we don’t misunderstand what Jesus says in these verses? Why do these verses not teach that our works save us?
- ③ Read the last part of the quote again from Thursday’s lesson study: “When we love people the way Jesus loved them, His work for us is done. We are ready for heaven. We have heaven in our hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 641, adapted. What does this quote mean to you? What does this quote tell us about God and about heaven itself? How can we live more as the citizens of heaven right now? How is sharing and showing God’s love the answer?

KNEELING IN FRONT OF A STATUE

As an opera singer, Maria sings in front of large crowds. Maria has sung in a dozen countries. One country Maria visited was North Korea. There, she saw people bow down in front of a 72-foot tall statue of Kim Sung. Kim Il Sung was the first leader of North Korea.

Maria is a loyal Seventh-day Adventist. (Her name has been changed in the story to protect her.)

During the visit to North Korea, Maria and a group of other singers went to the Mansu Hill Grand Monument, which shows heroes from the country's history. At the center of the monument is the very tall statue of Kim Il Sung. (A second 72-foot statue of Kim's son, Kim Jong Il, was later added to the monument.)

A crowd stood around the statue of Kim Il Sung. Maria saw foreigners from Italy, France, and other countries. She saw North Koreans. They all bowed in front of the statue. Then Maria learned that she also was expected to bow to show respect.

A tour guide told Maria, "You must kneel down."

Maria thought about the first commandment, which says, " 'You must not worship any other gods except me' " (Exodus 20:3, ERV). The second commandment also forbids us to bow down to any statues: " 'Do not make for yourself statues of gods that look like [the same as] anything in the sky. They may not look like anything on the earth or in the waters either [too]. Do not bow down to them or worship them' " (Exodus 20:4, 5, NIV).

As Maria stood there, she remembered the story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. These three young men refused to bow to the 90-foot tall gold statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 3. Maria thought, "The book of Daniel really is not a made-up story or a fairy tale! That same story happens in real life in North Korea and in other places every day."

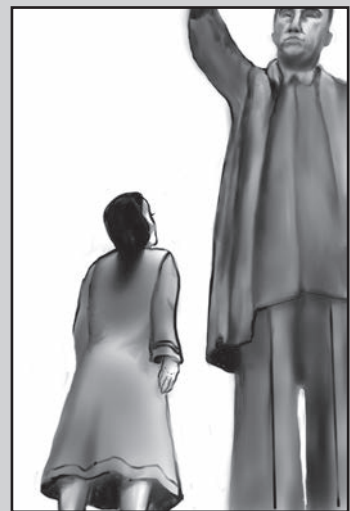
Maria stood straight and tall. She did not bow down.

Some people may think there's nothing wrong with bowing down to Kim Il Sung's statue. But Maria saw the experience as much more. During that time, Maria believed that God was asking her to take a public stand for Him.

Several days later, Maria gave a copy of *Steps to Christ* to her tour guide. She prays that the tour guide and all North Koreans learn about Jesus.

This quarter's 13th Sabbath Offering will be used to share the Good News about Jesus with people in North Korea and other countries nearby. Thank you for planning to give a big offering this Sabbath.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Maria stood straight and tall. She did not bow down.