

Glimpses of Our God
God the Lawgiver

Lesson #6 for February 11, 2012

Scriptures: Hebrews 12:21; Romans 7:8-13; Job 24:14, 15; Exodus 16:4-30; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16; Romans 13:8-10.

1. This lesson is about God as a lawgiver. What are the implications of being a lawgiver? In American society, Congress makes laws; but, the police enforce them. In the case of God, is He both the lawgiver and the law enforcer? Or, does breaking one of God's laws have naturally inherent consequences? Are God's laws something like the owner's manual that comes with an automobile? If one follows the directions, the car works better and lasts longer! Another way to look at this is to look back in time before Lucifer rebelled in heaven. There was perfect harmony. And again, if we look forward to the time after the third coming when heaven and earth are made new, there will once again be harmony and peace because everyone will love everyone else and everyone will naturally obey God's laws. What is different now? Has God changed?
2. Following the guidance of Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists have taught that the law is a transcript of God's character. (*Christ's Object Lessons* 305.3; 315.1; *Great Controversy* 434.1) Does this imply that God's laws are an inherent part of His character? Is God bound by His laws? Do you believe that God's laws are an inseparable part of His government? Following God's laws is the only way to live in harmony and happiness for eternity. Was there any law before God began creating? (See *MB* 109.2; *Maranatha* 79.7; *Prayer* 294.4)
3. When you hear that a new law has been passed by your government, do you think that you are being protected? Or, do you think that you are being restricted or restrained? Do teenagers believe that God's laws are a protection for them? Do the young people in your church regard the Ten Commandments as "a hedge, a protection, something created for us, for our own good"? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Saturday, February 4) When one is young, it is natural to want to be completely free to do whatever s/he wants without worrying about any results or consequences. But the consequences come. The larger number of people that live in a confined space, the more limited one's freedoms have to be.
4. In some translations, 1 John 3:4 suggests that "sin is lawlessness" or "sin is the transgression of the law." (The latter is a very free translation of the original Greek writings.) Romans 3:23 and many other passages in Scripture tell us that we are all sinners. This means that we all transgress God's law. Why do we do that? Why do we sin? Why are we attracted by certain sins?
5. Read Exodus 19:18,19; 20:18-20; Deuteronomy 5:22; Hebrews 12:21. Why did God choose to give the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel in that way? Was God "laying down the law"? Do children love their parents when they lay down the law? What do you think was the primary reaction of the children of Israel during that experience at the foot of Mount Sinai? Was it overwhelming terror? Is that the only thing they understood? Did that giving of the law lead them to want to love God more? Or, to be afraid of God? Did they recognize all the implications of what God said? Did they realize how far they had gone away from God's plan for their lives? (*Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 309,310) What do you think the people said to each other about that experience? Small children tend to be frightened to death when they see fireworks. At Mount Sinai, was there any mention of

healing or salvation? Was there any mention of a plan of salvation? Or, of the cross? Much later, prophets and apostles discussed the implications of law and how it points out sin. It convicts people of wrongs. And when we have the opportunity to see the consequences of sin, we realize that God was right.

6. How do you feel when you read Exodus 20:1-17? Do you find that one or more of the commandments convict you of sin? Are you more convicted by Exodus 20 or by Matthew 5:17-48? That is for adults. Do you think you share in the experience of Paul as described in Romans 7:8-13? Do we understand *agape* love which summarizes God's laws?
7. The role of law is greatly debated among Christians in our day. Many Christians want to dismiss the Ten Commandments as old Jewish rules. However, there is plenty of evidence that at least some of the commandments were in force long before Sinai. The concept of the Sabbath commandment was clearly given in Genesis 1 & 2. As described in Genesis 4, Cain felt very guilty after killing his brother. Was that a result of violation of a known commandment from God? Or, was it an inherent moral sensibility?
8. In Genesis 9:6, it suggests that those who take the lives of other human beings will be killed themselves. Job, who apparently lived around the time of Abraham or perhaps a little earlier, clearly understood the rightness and wrongness of certain behaviors. (Job 24:14-17) Isaac was told that his father Abraham had kept God's commandments. (Genesis 26:5) Even non-Israelite kings had some sense of what was right and what was wrong. (Genesis 20:9,10)
9. Jacob, when returning to Bethel where he had met God, told his family and his entire encampment to get rid of their idols. (Genesis 35:2,3) If they knew that those idols were contrary to God's law, why had they been carrying them around?
10. When we speak to our Christian friends about keeping the commandments and ask them in more detail exactly how they feel about them, it is clear that the one commandment they want to avoid keeping is the Sabbath commandment. Clearly, they want to identify the Sabbath as strictly a Jewish requirement. However, Genesis 2:1-3 clearly show that the Sabbath was given at the beginning of this world's history, long before there were any Jews.
11. Read Exodus 5:1-5. Translated literally, verse 5 says, "You make them Sabbath from their labor!" Was Pharaoh complaining about their observance of the seventh day? Did they observe the Sabbath during much of their slavery?
12. Read Exodus 16:4-30. It is clear from the manna experience that God expected them to observe the Sabbath even before the giving of the Ten Commandments.
13. How do you feel about the Sabbath? Do you look forward to those holy hours coming each week? Do you enjoy setting aside that time for God? Are there some things about the Sabbath you dislike? Are there certain restrictions involved in Sabbathkeeping which you wish you could do away with? Or, which you simply choose to ignore?
14. Many people are not aware of the fact that each of the Ten Commandments except the tenth had a death penalty connected with it! (See, for example, Numbers 15:27-31; compare Numbers 15:32-36) Does that seem a little harsh to you? What is an unintentional sin? How many of our sins are unintentional? And, how many are intentional? Should we be following those rules today? Every time we sin, we are saying: "God, leave me alone. I want to do what I want to do right now!"

15. Read Isaiah 48:17, 18. Do you really believe that God's laws were given for your own good? Do you delight in them? (Psalm 119:69-72) Is it clear in your mind that the natural consequences and punishments which result from breaking the law teach us to keep the law? In what sense does the law make us wise? (Psalm 119:97-103)
16. It is very clear that within a few weeks after the giving of the commandments at Mount Sinai, people were dancing drunk and naked around a golden fertility cult symbol. They had promised to keep all of God's commands. (Exodus 19:8) Later, Moses read those laws to them. Then, he wrote them down and repeated the commandments to the people again. (Exodus 24:3,7) The people's promises were no more than ropes of sand.
17. The Scriptures show us repeated examples of the children of Israel violating virtually every precept of God's laws. They varied from open and blatant disobedience of the law in many places in the Old Testament to extreme legalism in the days of Jesus. Did they ever love the law? Did they ever recognize that love was the fulfilling of all law? (Romans 13:8,10) How many of them recognized that the law was supposed to be for their benefit?
18. With the help of Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists have been given a fresh understanding of Scripture. Do you believe that this has been a blessing to you personally? Do you view the writings of Ellen White as something given for your own good and well-being? What benefits have accrued to the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a result of those special revelations? Is that why we live in this "Blue Zone"? We are a part of a worldwide church with fairly consistent beliefs and teachings. We have been taught about the great controversy over God's character and government, and that paradigm or world view makes it possible to understand many of the difficult passages in Scripture in a way that gives us a consistent picture of God. This is a tremendous advantage that Adventists have over our Christian friends. What percentage of Adventists recognize this fact? Do we believe that God is telling us the truth? Or, are we more attracted to the statements of the "father of lies"? (John 8:44) It does no good for God and Satan just to have a shouting match about who is telling the truth. (Genesis 2:17; 3:1-4) God has taken the time to prove that He is telling the truth. There are many stories and passages in Scripture that it would be very difficult to understand without an understanding of the great controversy over God's character and government.
19. Have you personally experienced the disastrous consequences of sin/transgression? Why do young people think that sin is fun? Do you? If love is the fulfilling of all law, (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8; 1 John 5:2,3) shouldn't that lead us naturally to want to obey the law and experience that love?
20. Do you think that all 10 of the Ten Commandments are still relevant to Christians today? Could we keep the Ten Commandments and still be free?

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.

The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. "The truth shall make you free;" (John 8:32) and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one's self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. (Galatians 5:23) The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is "the law of liberty." James 2:12.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* p. 466.

What did the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin say to themselves on their way home after that discussion with Jesus recorded in John 8?

21. In the Old Testament, we see God walking a kind of tightrope. At times, He thundered from Sinai or did something else frightening and scary. Then, everybody lined up in fear and said, "Yes, anything that You say we will do." (See Exodus 19:8) But, then God backed off a little bit and said: "No, I did not mean to scare you. I just wanted to talk to you." Then, everyone said, "If that is the case, we do not need to be so careful about following Your rules," and they wandered further and further away from God until He thundered again. They went back and forth and back and forth. See Judges 2 and 3 for an example of this cycle.
22. Do you find that certain aspects of the law awaken a sense of joy, praise, and love for the Lawgiver?
23. Are God's laws proscriptive, that is, imposed by God arbitrarily? Or, are they descriptive, that is, descriptions of the way reality works in our universe? Does living according to the Ten Commandments result in joyous living?
24. If you were given the responsibility of establishing a new government over a large group of people and you had to set up the initial laws, would you consider the Ten Commandments to be a good starting point? Would you want to leave any of those ten out?
25. Shortly after the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel were dancing drunk and naked around a golden fertility cult symbol. (Exodus 32) Many years later, Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel, arrived at the same mountain; and God spoke to him in "a still small voice" (KJV) of reason rather than using overwhelming power or force. (1 Kings 18,19) What did Elijah learn there? Why the different approach by God? If we truly believe that the Ten Commandments are a description of the way things ought to function here on this earth and if we truly want to follow each of those commandments, what kind of a society would result? What if we followed the additional requirements suggested in Matthew 5? Would the teenagers in our society think that all the fun was gone out of life? If so, why?

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