

# ***Growing in Christ***

## ***The Law and the Gospel***

Lesson #10 for December 8, 2012

Scriptures: Psalms 19:7,8; Exodus 23:1-9; 1 John 5:3; Romans 3:19,20; Exodus 20:11,12; Deuteronomy 5:15.

1. As suggested by the title, this week's lesson focuses on the purpose of the law and its relationship to the gospel.
2. Read 1 John 2:3,4. How can it be said that if we keep His commandments, we will know that we know Him? Is it obvious from reading the Ten Commandments that they are a revelation of God's character and His love? Why do I need to know God in order to keep the Ten Commandments? (Romans 13:8,10; James 2:8)
3. Do we need an update to the Ten Commandments? There is nothing in the Ten Commandments suggesting that we should not smoke, or watch too much TV, or even drive while under the influence or a myriad of modern "temptations"!
4. It has been suggested that the law embodies the principles that we need to understand and incorporate into our lives; and if we do incorporate those principles into our lives, we will become more like Jesus. But, how do we incorporate those principles into our lives? Down through the ages, legalists have suggested that if we try hard enough to keep all of the Commandments, we can be saved by keeping them. Either in the Old Testament or the New Testament, does it say that we can be saved by keeping the Commandments? What is the relationship between the law (the Ten Commandments) and the gospel? Why did John choose to say in 1 John 2:3,4 that keeping the commandments has something to do with a true knowledge of God?
5. Would a true and correct knowledge of God be an essential part of the gospel? On many occasions, we have suggested that Ellen White gave us something to think about very seriously in *Great Controversy* page 555:

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. (*Great Controversy* 555.1)
6. But, what is it that we are supposed to behold? If we are supposed to behold God and all that He has done as described through all of Scripture and all of history, is it important to understand all the things that He has asked us to do?
7. Has God ever asked us to do anything which is not for our best good? Do you find the law very helpful in daily living? If we add Matthew 5-7 to our understanding of the law, does that clarify things? Or, just scare you?
8. Here we have a real conundrum. The Bible does suggest that if we could fully keep the law, we could be saved by doing so. For example, consider the famous verses in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Several New Testament writers recognized the very significant impact of those words. If we allow God to put His law within our hearts and thus recognize Him as our God and recognize that thereby we become His people, isn't that God's ideal? Isn't that what is implied by James 2:8? If we could keep the whole law, we could be saved by keeping it? (Of course, the problem is that we cannot!) Remember that love is the fulfilling of all law.
9. Do we need a law to point out our sin? Wouldn't it be safe for God to take to heaven

someone who observed every detail of the law? What is the problem with that approach to salvation? The Pharisees and scribes multiplied extremely detailed rules to try to force themselves—and others—to keep the law. But, we know what the final result was.

10. The law does one thing, and it does it very well. It points out sin.
11. The word *torah* in the Old Testament and *nomos* in the New Testament mean “direction” or “guidance.” They are words which were used to summarize all of God’s instructions.
12. Seventh-day Adventists—following the guidance of Ellen White—have said that the law is a transcript of God’s character:

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. 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. (*Christ’s Object Lessons* 315.1)

13. Read Psalm 19:7,8; Romans 7:12; and Psalm 119:151,152,172. The Bible writers described the law as good, perfect, right, holy, permanent or everlasting, and full of truth. What could possibly be wrong with such a document? The Law—to a Jew that meant the five books of Moses—is full of instruction on morality, ethics, health, sexuality, diet, work, and many other things.
14. In general, we have tended to divide God’s instructions in the Old Testament into three categories: 1) Ceremonial rules, 2) Civil regulations, and 3) Moral laws. Is it always clear to you in which category each instruction from God belongs? Is there any overlap?
15. Read Exodus 23:1-9. In these verses we are told not to be dishonest, not to lie, not to obstruct or pervert justice, not to take bribes, and not to mistreat foreigners. Would those be civil requirements? Or, moral judgments? Or, both?
16. When did God first give His laws to the human race? Did God need to instruct Adam not to commit adultery? We are told that Abraham commanded his household after him and instructed them on keeping the commandments. (Genesis 26:5) There are many verses in the Bible before the time of the exodus that give us guidance in moral areas which later appear to have been incorporated into the Ten Commandments. Genesis 35:1-4 is a story about removing idols. In connection with creation, God told us to rest on the Sabbath. When Cain killed Abel, God made it very clear that killing was not a good thing. Joseph refused to commit adultery with Potiphar’s wife because it would be a sin against God. The ten sons of Jacob took the money which had been secretly put in their sacks by Joseph’s assistants when they went home the first time and took it back to Egypt because they did not believe in stealing. Even Pharaoh rebuked Abraham for lying about his wife.
17. Do the regulations in the Ten Commandment make sense to you? If you were responsible for setting up the rules for a new community, which one of the Ten Commandments would you be willing to leave out?
18. James 2:10,11 suggests that if we break one commandment, we are breaking them all. How could that be true? Some have suggested that the Ten Commandments are like a chain; if you break one link, the chain is no longer of any value. A better suggestion might be something like this: If you were responsible for choosing who could be admitted to heaven, would you be happy to admit murderers? Adulterers? Liars? Thieves? Even those

who are covetous or selfish? Wasn't that what started the great controversy in the beginning—in heaven next to God's throne?

19. Read 1 John 5:3. Is it obvious that keeping the commandments is an expression of our love for God? Didn't Jesus say, "If you love Me, keep My commandments"? (John 14:15) Earlier, He had said that He was giving them a new commandment to love one another. And in John 13:35 He said: "If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples." Is real Christian love so remarkable and so unusual that everyone notices?
20. Virtually all Christians will say that God's law is still binding on Christians. The exact role that the law is supposed to play is another matter. Romans 3:19,20 suggests that the law applies only to those under its authority. But, then it goes on to say that the whole world will be brought into judgment. No one can be put right in God's sight by doing what the law requires. What the law does is to make people know that they have sinned.
21. Read Romans 7:7. When Paul first realized the implications of the statement in this verse, he was very upset. He thought that as a Pharisee he could do all the things that all the little rules required, and thus earn salvation. But, the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment suggested that he could not even want to do anything wrong without sinning! It made him angry. But, then he realized after some more careful thought that the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment is what makes it safe to admit people to heaven. It will be safe to have people living next door to us in heaven not because they have the Ten Commandments posted on their wall but because they have them in their hearts and they do not even want to do what is wrong.
22. Our world is awash in sin. It is on the freeway. It is advertised on billboards, on television, and on the Internet. How can we possibly avoid it? Look at some of the results of what sin has done to our world. How has sin impacted even the lives of Christians? How has it impacted our own lives?
23. Most Christians will admit that nine of the Ten Commandments seem reasonable and logical. It is only the Sabbath commandment which seems to them to be ceremonial and no longer necessary. Are they saying, "How can we afford to give a whole day to God?" Seventh-day Adventists have spent a lot of energy focusing on the fact that the seventh-day Sabbath is God's only holy day. That is suggested by many verses in the Bible, starting with Genesis 1&2. The Sabbath commandment in Exodus makes it very clear. (Exodus 20:9-11) But, it is interesting to notice that when the Sabbath commandment was repeated in Deuteronomy 5:15, a different reason for keeping the Sabbath is stated. In Exodus we are instructed to keep the Sabbath because God created us. In Deuteronomy the children of Israel were instructed to keep the Sabbath as a reminder of the fact that God redeemed them from Egyptian bondage. He created them, (Exodus 20:11) and He gave them freedom or "recreated" them as humans instead of slaves. (Deuteronomy 5:15)
24. So, what is the main purpose of the Sabbath? God calls it a sign between us and Him that we belong to Him. (Exodus 31:13) In many places the Sabbath is described as a rest. But, as we look in the New Testament, we find that Jesus was frequently in conflict with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem over Sabbathkeeping. (John 5 & 9, for example) Why was it that so often what is recorded about what Jesus did involved Sabbathkeeping and keeping it in a way other than what the Pharisees did? And when He was crucified on Friday evening, He chose to rest in the grave over the Sabbath to add additional meaning to the Sabbath. Thus, the Sabbath is intended to remind us of all that God has done for us in the plan of salvation. But, that is not all. Read Isaiah 66:23. We are told that we will continue to keep the Sabbath in heaven and in the new earth.
25. Just as national holidays and birthdays are our celebration of events that have happened,

giving us an opportunity to think back over them, the Sabbath was intended to remind us of all the most significant things that God has done for us down through the generations: creation, redemption from sin, salvation, and glorification. It is also intended to remind us of what God has promised will happen when we rejoin Him in heaven in the future.

26. Genesis 1&2 make it clear that God wants us to keep the seventh-day Sabbath as a reminder of creation. Both Paul and John made it very clear that Jesus was the Creator of all things (Colossians 1:14-16; John 1:1-14) and also our Redeemer. He came to this earth to be Immanuel, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23)

27. Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63:

Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 63.2)

28. What is implied by these words? Is God trying to tell us that it required a very big price to pay for our salvation? Or, is He trying to tell us that since the questions and accusations that Satan has leveled against God in the great controversy are about God Himself, they need to be answered by God Himself? Only God can demonstrate that truth.

29. When you keep the Sabbath carefully, do you feel a little bit like a legalist? Is God concerned about our "keeping the edges" of the Sabbath, for example?

30. We know that Satan has been very successful in attacking Sabbath observance. Why do you think Satan has done everything possible to convince people that the Sabbath does not need to be observed any more? Do you look forward to the coming of the Sabbath more than to its conclusion? What would happen if we could live in a community here on this earth where everyone had God's law firmly written in his heart? (Jeremiah 31:31-34) How will we keep the Sabbath in heaven? Might we come together to celebrate what we have experienced and learned in the prior week? Might God then suggest something that we could do that would build on that for the next week?

31. God desperately wants to develop a group of friends here on this earth who understand Him and have come to know Him well and on that basis choose voluntarily to do all that He asks them to do because they recognize that God would never ask them to do anything which is not for their own good.

32. Do you ever feel that God's laws and rules are somehow a restriction on your freedom?

33. Many Christian martyrs down through the centuries have died for one thing or another. What Christian beliefs are so important to you that you would be willing to die rather than give them up? (Galatians 1:8,9) Would you be willing to die rather than give up the Sabbath? Don't we believe that the day is coming when Satan through his evangelistic effort as described in Revelation 13 will manage to bring about first a national Sunday Law (*RH* Dec. 18, 1888; *7BC* 977.2) and then an international Sunday Law? (*7T* 141 (1902); *LDE* 135.5) Might we end up in prison because of our Sabbath observance? Are we prepared to do that?

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