

# **Christ and His Law**

## **The Apostles and the Law**

Lesson #11 for June 14, 2014

Scriptures: Romans 3:31; 6:15; Acts 10:9-14; John 15:1-11; James 2:1-26; Hebrews 3:7-19; Jude 5-7.

1. This lesson will focus on whether or not there is any evidence in Scripture to support the idea that the observance of the Ten Commandments was done away with in the apostolic age. Is there? How is the “spirit of prophecy” manifested at the end of this world’s history?
2. Read Revelation 12:17 and 14:12. (Compare Revelation 19:10.) Based primarily on these two verses, Seventh-day Adventists have believed that the keeping of the law is an essential part of the beliefs of the final remnant church. Thus, the attack on the importance of the law or suggesting that it is no longer necessary for Christians to keep it, is a direct attack on one of our fundamental teachings.
3. Why is it that so many of our Christian friends believe that the keeping of the Ten Commandments is no longer necessary? What are they specifically objecting to? Notice these words from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Saturday, June 7.

First, some (as we have seen) look at certain New Testament texts that condemn a false understanding of the law’s function but conclude that the problem is with the law itself. As a result, they claim that the Ten Commandments are not obligatory for those under the new covenant.

Second, others are so convinced that the Sabbath is not binding on Christians that, in order to justify this position, they claim that all the commandments have been crucified with Jesus on the cross.

Third, some argue that the other nine commandments are in effect but that the fourth, the seventh-day Sabbath, has been superseded by Sunday, which is kept in honor of the resurrection of Jesus.

4. A careful reading of Scripture will show that each of these three arguments is unbiblical. So, how can we best understand the biblical arguments and, when necessary, diplomatically discuss it with our Sundaykeeping friends? What constitutes correct Sabbathkeeping?
5. Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. Many Christians believe that Paul was the true author of Christianity as we now understand it. They take certain texts that Paul wrote as an indication that the law no longer applies. See Romans 3:28; 6:14; 7:4; 10:4; and Galatians 3:24-25. It is interesting to notice that Galatians 3:24 literally says only that “the law has become *our tutor to Christ* so that we may be justified by faith.” Most translators think that additional wording must be included between *tutor* and *Christ*. Some translate it as “to bring us to Christ” while others prefer to say, “until Christ came.” One’s attitude toward the law will obviously affect which of those translations he prefers.
6. In light of the passages that we have just read, compare Romans 3:31; 6:15; 7:7-12; and Galatians 3:21. These verses should make it very clear that the former verses that we read must be understood in their proper context. Are these verses in direct conflict with those referenced in Item #5?
7. So, what is the proper relationship between grace and law? Certainly, no Christian who takes the New Testament seriously can doubt that we are saved by faith and grace. We need to place our faith in a very gracious God. But, once we have done that, does it mean that we can ignore some of the most important things that God has said? When God took the trouble of speaking to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai and writing down the Ten

Commandments with His own finger on tables of stone, did He intend for those directions to be ignored? Can we always count on His grace to forgive our ongoing sins?

8. Let us focus now on the attitude of the early apostles towards the law. Read 1 Peter 2:9 and compare Exodus 19:8 and 24:3,7. Isn't it clear by comparing these verses that Peter thought that the Christian church was to carry on the doctrines and teachings that God gave to the Israelites at Mount Sinai?
9. Read Acts 10:9-14. It is clear from this story that Peter continued to regard the Jewish regulations from the Old Testament as binding upon him and others. Is there any hint that Peter would have considered the Ten Commandments unnecessary?
10. Look now at John's writings. Read John 15:1-11 and 1 John 2:3-6. John specifically stated that every person is to keep the commandments. Surely, if there was any disciple who understood Jesus and was close to Him, it was John, the one who came to be known as the "beloved disciple." John reported that Jesus kept all His Father's commands. (John 15:10) And John very clearly understood that love is the fulfilling of all law. (Compare 2 John 6 with Romans 13:8,10.)
11. How do you understand these words from Ellen White?

The law of God requires that we love our fellow men as we love ourselves. Then every power and action of the mind must be put forth to that end—to do the greatest amount of good. . . . How pleasing to the Giver for man to hold the royal gifts of the soul so that they shall tell with power upon others! They are the connecting link between God and man, and reveal the Spirit of Christ and the attributes of heaven. The power of holiness, seen but not boasted of, speaks more eloquently than the most able sermons. It speaks of God, and opens to men their duty more powerfully than mere words can do.—Ellen G. White, Letter 39, 1887; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 20, pp. 137-138; *Christ Triumphant* 210.5.

12. Jesus Himself taught and hopefully Seventh-day Adventists have consistently taught that the Ten Commandments are summarized in love to God and love to our fellow human beings. The very essence of God's government is *love*. By contrast, the very essence of Satan's government is *selfishness*. Which government would you prefer to live in?
13. Not all of the apostles were disciples. The book of James was almost certainly written by the older stepbrother of Jesus. Early in His ministry, Jesus was approached by His brothers who because they were older and thought that they had authority over Him tried to tell Him what to do. Jesus rejected their suggestions. (John 7:1-9) We certainly do not fully understand why, but shortly after His death and resurrection, Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers became His fervent followers along with the disciples. (See Acts 1:14.) James who was apparently the oldest stepbrother of Jesus (See Matthew 13:55.) later rose to a very prominent position in the church as suggested by Acts 15:13 and Galatians 1:19.
14. In his short book, James focused on the challenges of establishing new congregations and getting the members to love each other. Some of the members were Jews from various groups—like the Pharisees—and others were Gentiles. (See James 2:1-26, especially verses 7-9.) As a church leader, James must have felt a real responsibility to try to maintain unity.
15. Many Christians think that Paul's emphasis on faith and grace is in contradiction to James's emphasis on good deeds. How do you explain James 2:26 in contrast with Ephesians 2:8-9? But, those who want to contrast Paul and James apparently fail to read Romans 2:13. We have already seen in Romans 3:31 and 6:15 that Paul considered the law essential. He spelled out what law he was talking about specifically in Romans 13:9. And James certainly understood that the essence of God's law is love. (James 2:8) In light of these passages and

certainly if we read their writings more extensively, we will recognize that there is no conflict between James and Paul.

16. Jude was another brother of Jesus. Read Jude 5-7 and compare Hebrews 3:7-19. The first generation that left Egypt all died in the wilderness because they failed to keep God's commands. Like the other apostles, Jude made it clear that God expects an obedient life.
17. So, who is behind the effort to set aside God's laws? While we need to be careful how we state this—especially to our Christian friends—there is no doubt that Satan is the author of this movement.
18. James and Paul were trying to get us to avoid two extremes: 1) The idea that we can be saved by keeping the law, and 2) The idea that the law is no longer in effect. If, in fact, the very essence of observing God's law is to love, how could anyone be against love? **There is no evidence from Scripture that the early apostles or disciples were promoting or even condoning a setting aside of God's law.**
19. This lesson should have taught us the importance of taking the full context into consideration when trying to interpret a single verse. In the days of the Cold War, the United States spent millions of dollars trying to develop a computer system that could translate back and forth between Russian and English. The computer, of course, took a very literal approach to the translation of the language without considering the context. At one point, someone put into the computer the English expression taken from Jesus's statement to the sleeping disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38) The Russian expression that came out said, in essence, "The wine is okay, but the meat has gone bad." Surely, this brief example should encourage us to take the largest possible context in trying to interpret Scriptures! Seventh-day Adventists should read each portion of Scripture in the full light of the great controversy and our understanding of the plan of salvation.
20. The early church had some major issues that needed to be resolved. The first crisis is described in Acts 6:1-7 and was resolved by the choosing of the seven deacons. After talking to each other and praying about it, they came up with a win-win solution.
21. Read Acts 15. As described in this passage, there was a more serious disagreement. The Jewish Christians from Judea and Jerusalem felt strongly that new Christians should follow all the Jewish teachings and customs before they could become Christians. Having just returned from their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas realized that to require Gentiles to follow all the Jewish customs including circumcision would be a disaster. This conflict came to a head at Paul's home church in Antioch. So, Paul and Barnabas and others traveled to Jerusalem to resolve the issue. It would have been very interesting to hear the discussion between Paul—the formerly-very-devout Pharisee—and the other group of Pharisees who had become believers. (Acts 15:2,5) Fortunately, after Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James made speeches, they came to a mutually agreed-upon solution. Would you consider their solution to be a compromise? Did that keep peace in the new churches?
22. Christianity is generally recognized as the religion that is supposed to promote love. Are we doing that? The new pope, Pope Francis, is trying very hard to promote love. Notice these words from an article posted by Michael Snyder concerning the beliefs of Pope Francis.

His beliefs do not appear to be very consistent at all. He just seems to have an overwhelming desire to "unite" with everyone out there that has any kind of religious faith.

But we do know one kind of people that he does not like. He does not like "ideological Christians" that take their faith very seriously...

“In ideologies there is not Jesus: in his tenderness, his love, his meekness. And ideologies are rigid, always. Of every sign: rigid. And when a Christian becomes a disciple of the ideology, he has lost the faith: he is no longer a disciple of Jesus, he is a disciple of this attitude of thought... For this reason Jesus said to them: ‘You have taken away the key of knowledge.’ [Luke 11:52, *NIV* and *NASB*] The knowledge of Jesus is transformed into an ideological and also moralistic knowledge, because these close the door with many requirements. The faith becomes ideology and ideology frightens, ideology chases away the people, distances, distances the people and distances of the Church of the people. **But it is a serious illness, this of ideological Christians.** It is an illness, but it is not new, eh?”

So what is going to come of all this?

It will be very interesting to watch.

It is also interesting to note that there is a 900-year-old prophecy that seems to indicate that Pope Francis could be the last Pope. If that prophecy is accurate, then we could very well be living at a time when we will see the emergence of a one world religion.

Just a few short decades ago, a one world religion would have been absolutely unthinkable.

But now the pieces are starting to come together, and it will be very interesting to see what happens next.—Michael Snyder, *The Truth, Exposing The Truth About Our World One Story At A Time*, Posted: Monday, February 24, 2014 at 4:34 am. [Content in brackets is supplied.]

23. Are Seventh-day Adventists among those who would be considered to be “ideologues”? Are our fundamental beliefs very important to us? Or, is it more important for us to love our fellow Christians and compromise with them? Are these two ideas in conflict? Are we prepared to compromise with the Catholic Church? Surely, we live at a time when the importance of what we believe is becoming critical. Can we love our fellow Christians and speak the truth in love at the same time?
24. Some want to see the Ten Commandments as a long list of “don’ts”—we are not supposed to do anything wrong. We should note that there is a whole community of people right here in Loma Linda who never do anything wrong! Wouldn’t you consider such people saints? They are buried in the ground at the cemetery! There is more to being a friend of God and a true follower of the gospel than just not doing anything wrong!
25. When our Christian friends think that they need to get rid of the law, what are they really trying to get rid of? Is it the seventh-day Sabbath? Is it the Bible?
26. We are living in very exciting times. Do we understand the Scriptures well enough to correctly represent our God? How should we respond to Pope Francis?

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