

Christ and His Law

Christ's Church and the Law

Lesson #12 for June 21, 2014

Scriptures: Genesis 2:16-3:7; 6; 12; Deuteronomy 7:6-12; Galatians 3:6-16; Revelation 12:17; 14:6-12.

1. The history of our response to God's love and His law has been a very sad one. God started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve who sinned. Their descendants rapidly became very wicked, and God had to start over again with Noah. It was not long before his evil descendants built the tower of Babel, and God had to start over with Abraham. Abraham's descendants had ups and downs. God led Israel out of Egypt. He started over with a few Jews who had enough faith to return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Finally, God had to turn from them and begin working with the early church. Some 1500 years later, He worked with the Protestant Reformation; 300 years after that, the Adventist Church arose out of the Great Disappointment. After all those attempts at developing a faithful people, does it seem likely or even possible that we could be the final, end-time people who will carry God's message to the world?
2. This lesson will focus on how God's law related to each of those groups down through history and on how law and grace together provide the key to our salvation.
3. Why did God put the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden and allow Adam and Eve the freedom to eat of it? Without freedom, there could be no love. Without freedom, any expressions of love would be only the words of a robot. But, in order to have freedom, we must have choice; and in order to have choice, we must have an orderly universe so that we can have some idea of what it is we are choosing. The orderly universe which is necessitated by God's love makes it possible for science to take place. That orderly universe is described by God's laws. Thus, God's law is a description of reality and how it is supposed to work. God's laws are not arbitrary decrees given to us to limit our freedoms; God's laws are His descriptions of how things must be if we want to live forever in a loving universe.
4. So, in light of all that, how are we supposed to live our lives? How are we supposed to make moral choices? What is a moral choice? What determines how we make choices? How often are our choices truly moral choices? Most of the decisions that we make every day are preprogrammed habits. If we had to carefully think through everything we did from the time we get up in the morning—for example, which shoe to put on which foot and how to put on a shirt and a pair of pants—and each one of those choices had to be a carefully thought-out decision, we would be tired before we even got to work! We need habit patterns.
5. Only rarely do we make true moral choices. We make a moral choice when there are two pathways that seem more or less equivalent and we choose one rather than the other because we believe it is the more loving thing to do.
6. Read Genesis 6:1-8. How do we explain Genesis 6:7 in light of 1 Samuel 15:29 and Malachi 3:6. Compare 1 Samuel 15:10,11,35. We believe that God is omniscient and that He has unlimited foreknowledge. So, how can He be sorry He has done something? Is it possible that God knew in advance exactly what was going to happen, but He needed to proceed with doing it in order to teach us and the universe some very important lessons? Was God sorry?
7. The problem which developed just before the flood seemed to have resulted from the "sons of God" becoming interested in and marrying the "daughters of men." Many of our Christian friends believe that angels actually came down and cohabited with human females. But, angels cannot procreate! Satan certainly would if he could! It is true that there are other places in the Bible where the expression "sons of God" may refer to angels. In Job 1:6 and 2:1, the term "sons of God" is apparently referring to the leaders of other worlds. But, Ellen White said clearly that in this passage in Genesis, the term "sons of God" is a reference to the descendants of Seth, and the term "daughters of men" is a reference to the daughters of the descendants of

Cain. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 81.2; John 1:12; Romans 8:14) We see a very repetitious story. When evil gets mixed up with good, the evil almost always wins, and the good collapses.

8. But, at the end of history, the remnant spoken of in Revelation are supposed to stand firm and tall in the face of the worst evil that has ever occurred. Is that really possible this far from the tree of life?
9. What were the antediluvian people doing? They clearly turned from God and ignored His instructions. They did exactly what they felt like doing instead of doing what was right as God's law described it.
10. Read Genesis 6:9-11. Are we supposed to believe that Noah was sinless? What does the Bible mean when it says that Noah was blameless and walked with God? (Genesis 6:9) If he was blameless, why did he need the grace of God? Or, is this just a reference to the fact that he was dealing with a very gracious God? **The real question is: If you had been in God's position in the days of Noah, would you have just wiped out everyone and started over?**
11. So, what happened after the flood? Did Noah's family learn the lesson so well that they carefully instructed their descendants who carefully followed God's will? Of course not! It was not long before they were building the tower of Babel. (Genesis 11:1-9)
12. Notice these words from Ellen White.

Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119.

13. Read Genesis 12:1-3. Why did God pick Abram and promise him so much? Was Abram chosen just because he was the best man available at the time? We know much about the life of Abram/Abraham. We know about the times when he lied about his wife; but, we also know about his trust in God. He waited until it was seemingly impossible for Sarah to have a son; and then, God gave one. What was the relationship between Abraham and Melchizedek? Remember that Abraham lived at a time when there was no church, no pastor, no Bible, and no fellowship of any kind that might resemble a church. How did he maintain his relationship with God? Did God visit Abraham on a fairly regular basis? How much evidence do we have?
14. It is interesting to notice that the Egyptian pharaoh seemed to have some understanding of what was right. So did Abimelech in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 20:1-18; 12:10-20) But, in the final test, Abraham proved absolutely trustworthy. (See Genesis 22.)
15. Many scholars believe that the Ten Commandments as well as many of the other laws that Moses wrote down were really copied from Egyptian or Mesopotamian codes from earlier days. Is that true? A careful comparison between the former codes and the Ten Commandments as given by God to Moses show some very important differences. Those other codes refer to worshiping idols. By contrast, we know clearly that there is only one God. (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 4:35,39; 7:9; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6; 45:5-6,21-22)
16. Particularly in the book of Deuteronomy, we get the message that God will bless us if we do what is right and curse us if we do what is wrong. (See Deuteronomy 28.) Is that the picture of God you have? Isn't that what the Pharisees believed? Isn't that what most of the Jews in Jesus's day believed?
17. Why did God choose the descendants of Abraham to be His special, chosen people—a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation"? (Exodus 19:5-6. Compare 1 Peter 2:9.) Why did He choose to send Jesus to live among them? Could it be that God needed to show the dangers of rigid keeping of the law as well as the results of flagrant disobedience?

18. Read Galatians 3:6-25. Clearly, Paul believed that the promise made to Abraham was a direct reference to the coming of the Messiah. As you probably know, many interpreters of the Bible believe that the promise to Abraham was a promise that God would give him many descendants as a faithful people down through the generations. So, where did Paul get the idea that the prophecy was specifically referring to Jesus Christ?
19. Abraham and Sarah certainly had to learn patience. Do we need to learn that lesson as well? God worked patiently with Abraham's descendants for nearly 1600 years. Finally, He had to turn from them as His only select group of people and work through His disciples and the Christian church to spread the gospel to the whole world. What was the church supposed to learn from the life and death of Jesus that would turn the whole world upside down? (Acts 17:6) While His first disciples seemed to have been inordinately successful in spreading the gospel, it was not long before Satan managed to turn things around. Slowly, the Christian church fell into what we call the Dark Ages. Are we turning the world upside down?
20. Eventually, leading up to and in the early 16th century, the Protestant Reformation took real root, and Christianity came alive again. But unfortunately, the followers of Luther and Calvin and other reformers seemed to have had a very difficult time going beyond their initial steps. Eventually, through the great religious awakening of the early 19th century, a group of people formed who would focus on the second coming of Jesus Christ.
21. Read Revelation 12:17 and 14:6-12. These are verses that should be very familiar to all Seventh-day Adventists. And what are the identifying marks of God's faithful people at the end of time? Clearly, they are expected to keep the commandments of God. They are also supposed to bear witness to the faithfulness of Jesus. They are supposed to be preaching the truth about God just as Jesus did. And we need to remember that to keep the commandments is to be truly loving. (Romans 13:8-10)
22. But, it is so easy to become legalistic about keeping the commandments. We need to remember that the best commandment keepers of all time crucified Jesus and rushed to get Him buried so they could get home to keep the Sabbath which was actually in honor of the One they had just crucified!
23. We now stand near the end of this earth's history. If we are to believe Revelation 14:6-12, the time has come for us to understand very clearly the messages of those three angels and in every way we possibly can to make those messages clear to the world around us.

The three angels of Revelation 14 represent the people who accept the light of God's messages and go forth as His agents to sound the warning throughout the length and breadth of the earth. Christ declares to His followers: "Ye are the light of the world." [Matthew 5:14] To every soul that accepts Jesus the cross of Calvary speaks: "Behold the worth of the soul: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.'" Mark 16:15. **Nothing is to be permitted to hinder this work. It is the all-important work for this time; it is to be far-reaching as eternity. The love that Jesus manifested for the souls of men in the sacrifice which He made for their redemption, will actuate all His followers.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 455.2-456.0. [Content in brackets and bold type is supplied.]

The theme of greatest importance is the third angel's message, embracing the messages of the first and second angels. All should understand the truths contained in these messages and demonstrate them in daily life, for **this is essential to salvation**. We shall have to study earnestly, prayerfully, in order to understand these grand truths; and our power to learn and comprehend will be taxed to the utmost.—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* 196. [Bold type is supplied.]

24. Why did God use such strong language as recorded in Revelation 14:9-11? Are those verses an arbitrary statement from the God who wants to show who is boss at the end of this earth's history? Not at all! It is a direct response to Satan's threat in Revelation 13:17.
25. Do we have the kind of faith that Abraham had? What is faith? The Greek word *pistis* can be translated as faith, trust, confidence, or belief. One of the best definitions of *faith* that I have ever heard is the following:

Faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it without reservation for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"—Spoken many times by A. Graham Maxwell

26. Theologians and educated Christians love to talk about justification by faith, sanctification by faith, righteousness by faith, and even salvation by faith. What is the common thread in those expressions? Isn't it obviously *faith*? Why is faith so important? It is our relationship to God! Why did Paul say that faith is the only requirement for salvation? (Acts 16:31)
27. So, by our lives and our words, are we proclaiming the three angels' messages? Are we demonstrating the kind of love that Jesus kept talking about?
28. In light of all this, why are you a Seventh-day Adventist?

Seventh-day Adventists almost seem to be ashamed of our distinctive truths. Some see the application of the term *remnant* to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an exclusivist idea. In this lesson, we want to emphasize that the term *remnant*, while being biblically based, carries with it not a sense of superiority but a validation for mission. We are privileged to be part of the thread of God's salvation story that began in Eden and will conclude with Jesus' second coming.—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 145.

29. Seventh-day Adventists have been chosen to proclaim the final message to this world. Think of all the times when it seemed like God's faithful people were almost wiped out: at the flood, in Elijah's day, even at the first coming of Jesus.
30. Remember that the final remnant will not be identified by faithful membership in a particular organization but by their commitment to Jesus Christ and the truth that He gave about God.
31. Read Revelation 14:4. What does it mean to follow the Lamb wherever He goes? What happened to many little lambs in the Old Testament? What happened to the Lamb of God when He came to live among us? Are we prepared to follow Him even to death? Some of us may have to do that. Are you prepared?

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