

Christ and His Law

Christ's Death and the Law

Lesson #6 for May 10, 2014

Scriptures: Romans 4:15; 7:1-6,7-13; 8:5-8; Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 3:10.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss why Jesus had to die and what that tells us about the continued necessity of obedience to the commandments.
2. Consider this hypothetical situation described in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*.

A woman is driving way over the speed limit. Suddenly, she sees in her rearview mirror the flashing red and blue lights of a police car and hears the familiar wail of the siren. She pulls over, grabs her purse, and takes out her driver's license. The police officer approaches, takes her license, and returns to his car.

She wonders how much the ticket is going to be (she was way over the limit); she also worries about how she will be able to pay it. A few minutes later the police officer comes back and says, "OK, miss, what we are going to do, so that you don't have to face the penalty of the law again, is abolish the law. You no longer have to worry about the speed limit."

As ludicrous as that story is, it's no more so than the theology that teaches that after Jesus died, the law, the Ten Commandments, was abolished. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, May 10)

3. Why do so many of our Christian friends suggest that the death of Jesus has done away with the law of God? We need to understand clearly that the death of Jesus does not "pay" for sin. This may sound like heresy to many. But, the death of Jesus merely demonstrates the final consequences of sin. There is no such thing as paying for sin. We cannot undo past sins. God is simply asking us to look clearly at the consequences of sin, realize that sin is deadly, and turn to Him seeking help to live a better life in the future. Notice these very interesting words from Ellen White.

The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness, seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression.

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure **result**. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure **result** is ruin and death.—Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 235.1,2. [Bold type is added.]

4. Read Romans 7:1-6. To many people, this passage seems very confusing. The way to understand it is to realize that the first husband being described is our old man of sin. So long as we are committed to living that kind of life, we will continue sinning; and the result will be death. (Romans 7:5) But, when we turn away from that old life of sin and honestly embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as our New Husband, realizing that He has never asked us to do anything which is not for our best good, we can live a new life of freedom. That does not mean that the old man of sin will not fight to regain his position!

5. Traditional theology teaches that when we accept Christ, we are “covered” by His righteousness. What does that mean? Does the righteousness of Christ somehow cover over our old sins? Are we accepted by God and allowed into heaven because He can no longer see the fact that we are sinners? Of course not! Zechariah 3:1-5 makes it clear that in the judgment scene, the old sinful self must be taken off before the new robe of righteousness can be put on.
6. There are two kinds of laws that we deal with as human beings. Some laws are *descriptive*, that is, like the law of gravity, they describe how things work. There is no such thing as a violation of the law of gravity. If we jump off of the top of a building, we do not violate the law of gravity; we just show how it works!
7. A second kind of law is a *proscriptive* law. These are the kind of laws that are made and changed by governments. Basically, they are somewhat arbitrary rules—like speed limits—set in place to try to control human behavior. So, which kind of law is God’s law? Are the laws against murder, adultery, stealing, or lying arbitrary laws? Or, are they descriptive laws? Does each one of these behaviors have natural consequences? If you kill someone, s/he is dead. There is no arbitrary way to change that consequence. While some of the other commandments may not be as easy to understand in that context, God has never asked us to do anything which is not ultimately for our best good. For those who realize the real purpose of God’s laws, they are a blessing, guiding us in our behavior.
8. Read Romans 8:1-8. In Romans 7, Paul had already discussed his troubles with keeping the law. Through the life and death of Jesus Christ, we are given a choice: 1) We can choose to live a life like the life of Jesus—as far as possible with God’s help—and the result will be an eternal life with Him; or, 2) We can continue to live our old selfish ways, and the result is a death which is the second death like the death He died. Living a sinful life inevitably leads to death. Giving up on those old sinful lives and turning to God as our Guide in life leads to eternal life.
9. When the law points out sin, our old natural selfishness rebels against giving up what we like to do. But, when we come to realize that God has only our happiness in mind and that everything He has asked us to do is for our best good, our relationship to the law dramatically changes. We thank God for the law.
10. Read Genesis 2:16-17 and Romans 6:23. The results of sin are inevitable consequences. God’s laws just point that out. A careful look at the writings of Moses will demonstrate that every one of the Ten Commandments except the tenth had a death penalty connected with it! (Look at #7 in the Leviticus Teacher’s Guide: http://www.theox.org/images/images_A2115/LEVITICUSstg1.pdf) Not even God can change the natural consequences or results of sin without changing His government of love, and He refuses to do that. If He did, the consequences would be disastrous.
11. So, how do we give up on the old man of sin? Why do we have those evil desires that keep popping up? Why do we like to sin? Our first parents chose to follow Satan instead of God; and from that day to this, our natural, inherent selfishness leads us toward sin. Even though mentally, as Paul says in Romans 7:14-25, we may realize the superiority of doing things God’s way, our selfish natures still want to do things our way. Selfishness is the very foundation of Satan’s government. Love is the foundation of God’s government. The consequences of sin are not arbitrary. God could not allow any sinner to enter heaven; if a person insists on pursuing her/his ways, it would just lead to another rebellion in heaven!
12. Read Romans 4:15; 5:13; and 7:7. Compare Isaiah 59:2. The law tells us what we should be doing. When we misbehave, it acts like a mirror, showing us the sinfulness of our ways. But, the mirror can never clean our faces. And what is God’s wrath that is brought down by the law? By choosing to violate God’s laws, we are separating ourselves from Him. As we sin, we are moving further and further away from God. By contrast, as we develop a faith relationship with God, we move closer and closer to Him. That is why Paul said in Romans 14:23, “Anything that

is not based on faith is sin.” (GNB) Faith and sin are opposites. The purpose of a mirror is to help us see the dirt that is on our face. It does not help to break the mirror or throw it away! A failure to turn to God, recognizing what He wants to do for us, will always prove to be deadly.

13. See 1 Corinthians 15:54-58. In what sense does sin get its power from the law? God is our loving Father, and He does not hold us responsible for something that we have never had the opportunity to know. But, He clearly understands the serious consequences of sin. So, He does His best to point out the truth about sin.
14. As we have pointed out many times in the past, Jesus died twice. He fell dying to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane before He had experienced any physical torture from human beings, or received any crown of thorns, or been crucified. (DA 693.1) An angel had to come to revive or strengthen Him. (Luke 22:43) When He was finally crucified, He was dead within six hours. People do not die of crucifixion in six hours. Jesus died of sin and the resultant separation from His Father. That is why He cried: “My God, my God, why did you abandon me.” (Matthew 27:46, GNB) A few moments later, He gave a shout and died.
15. There is a kind of strange paradox when we talk about the relationship between sin and the law. First Corinthians 15:56 tells us, “Sin gets its power from the law.” But, the law can never rectify past sins. And unfortunately, in our sinful world, we cannot stop sinning. The law is powerless to change us. The law can never bring life. (Galatians 3:21) The life and death of Jesus proved that God’s statement way back in the Garden of Eden that sin leads to death is absolutely true. (Genesis 2:16-17) Satan’s accusations against God—that He has lied to us (Genesis 3:1-5)—have been proved absolutely wrong. Satan is the liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)
16. So, how does the life and death of Jesus change us from sinners into saints? He lived 2000 years ago! How does that affect my life in the 21st century? Through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing as Jesus did, we can come to realize the truth about all of God’s guidance in Scripture. As we fill our minds with right things, it crowds out the wrong. (Philippians 4:8) If our salvation depended on our past behavior, we would all be lost. It is only by accepting the truth as lived out in the life and death of Jesus that we could leave our lives of sin behind.
17. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. (Compare Exodus 19:8 and 24:3,7.) That promise in the new covenant which is repeated several times in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-18) tells us that it is only God who can make the necessary changes in our lives. When we take the time to study Scripture, to think about God, to commune with Him in prayer, and then practice what we have learned by trying to share it with others, we are opening our minds to God and allowing Him to gradually change us to become more like Him. (*Great Controversy* 555)
18. What God is actually telling us through the new covenant is that whatever we did in the past does not matter anymore. If we are willing to live new lives in cooperation with Him, the past will not be remembered. God has not forgotten; He just chooses not to remember.
19. This change which takes place in us if we turn to Christ and choose to follow Him exclusively is such a radical change that it is called a new birth. (John 3:3-8) Is it obvious in the lives of the people in your church and your Sabbath school class that their lives are completely changed by their relationship with Jesus Christ? Is your life significantly different from your neighbors who may not be Christians?
20. If we claim to be Christians and still continue to sin, are we calling God a liar? (Romans 6:23; Genesis 2:16-17; and Ezekiel 18:4) How can we take these verses more seriously? We are so accustomed to living lives apart from God that we almost think it is normal. How did Jesus feel when He realized His closeness to the Father was being broken up?

The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face.

The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt. (*Desire of Ages* 753.1) [Bold type is added.]

21. How do you think it would affect our lives if we had that kind of a relationship with God?

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that **when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses**. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. **Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.** (*DA* 668.3) [Bold type is added.]

22. What are we doing to see this kind of transformation take place in our lives? Is this really impossible for us to do? Do we think that it is beyond God's power to make such a change in us? Read 1 John 5:3. Do we truly appreciate what God has done for us?

23. So, what are we supposed to learn from the death of Jesus? Through that incredible demonstration, the death of Jesus teaches us the fact that sin leads to death—not the first death, but the second death. Jesus's death did not set aside God's law; it proved the truthfulness of God's law. God cannot set aside His laws without changing His government of love; that He cannot do without fundamentally changing the way our universe works.

24. Many Christians believe that when they die, God will somehow balance their good deeds against their bad deeds; and if the good deeds are more than the bad deeds, they will be taken to heaven! Let us be very clear; good deeds can never undo bad deeds. No amount of righteous living can take away the fact that we are all sinners. (Romans 3:23) By His death, Jesus demonstrated once and for all the consequences of sin. There is nothing we can do to either add to or take away from that demonstration.

25. It is interesting to notice that many who want to do away with the law really only want to do away with one commandment, the Sabbath commandment. They recognize the truthfulness and the necessity for the other nine commandments. Why do they want to do away with the Sabbath commandment? Is it primarily because they do not understand the purpose of the Sabbath? Sabbath is supposed to be an opportunity for us to learn all of these lessons we have been talking about.

26. If you were setting up a new government somewhere and you had to start spelling out the laws that people were to live by in that new government, which of the Ten Commandments would you want to leave out? Many Christians believe that by dying, Jesus paid the penalty of the law. What does that mean? Is it true that when we sin, we anger God; and so, He is demanding a payment? When He said that sin leads to death, was He demanding that someone must die before He can be happy again? Or, does the death of Jesus simply demonstrate clearly once and for all the truth about the consequences of sin?

27. There are three verses in the New Testament that define *sin*. Read 1 John 3:4; James 4:17; and Romans 14:23. What do these verses teach us? Which is the most basic and fundamental definition of *sin*? Romans 14:23 tells us that sin takes us away from God while faith brings us nearer to God. Is that hard to understand? Could God make it any clearer?

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