

Christ and His Law

The Law of God and the Law of Christ

Lesson #8 for May 24, 2014

Scriptures: Matthew 19:16-20; John 13:34-35; Galatians 6:1-5; Acts 17:31; John 5:30.

1. This lesson will focus on the question: Is the law of God as given in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 still applicable to Christians today? And if so, how is it to be applied?
2. We are all aware that no matter where we live, there are various kinds of laws that we must obey. There are national laws, state laws, county laws, and local community laws that are applicable to us. However, laws tend to have a hierarchy. Generally, smaller organizations cannot make laws in contradiction to the laws of a higher organization. Recently, in the United States, we have seen some states make laws which are a contradiction to national laws. We have yet to see what the result will be.
3. In the case of Christ, even though He gave us a new commandment, (John 13:34-35) everything He did was and everything He asked us to do is in full harmony with the basic principles expressed in the Ten Commandments.
4. Why do some people believe that the Ten Commandments are no longer applicable to us? Some might even say that they are only applicable to people of Jewish descent. Would it be correct to say that any violation of the Ten Commandments would be sin? If that is true, then suggesting that it is not necessary for us to obey all of the Ten Commandments is, in effect, giving us license to sin! Are God's laws *proscriptive* or *descriptive*?
5. And what about the 613 other laws that the Jewish rabbis in Jesus day determined were actually a part of the Old Testament Scriptures? What did Jesus mean when He said that He had not come to "abolish the law *or the prophets*"? Was He suggesting that all of those rules that the Pharisees had put together were still applicable?
6. Read Matthew 19:16-30 and 22:34-40. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were constantly trying to find a basis on which to condemn and judge Jesus. They were also constantly trying to point out that they were the ultimate authorities about what should be taught and what should be believed. On one occasion, they sent a young man to test Jesus. In essence, the man asked Him, "What must I do to be saved?" When Jesus quoted five of the Ten Commandments, the young man responded by asking, "Which is the greatest commandment?" Instead of trying to set one commandment against the others by calling it greatest, Jesus talked about the basic principles of love for God and love for our fellow man. Of course, these ideas were not original with Jesus at that time. He had given the same ideas to Moses almost 1500 years earlier. (See Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5.) Jesus rightly summarized by saying that on those two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. In other words, the Ten Commandments are specific requirements that spell out some of the details of what it means to love God and to love our neighbor.
7. While Jesus was the original Giver of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and could have been qualified to change any of the Commandments if He thought it was necessary, He did not do so. Although He recognized His true parentage at least by the age of 12 (Luke 2:49) and even though He was the sovereign God of heaven, He went back home to Nazareth and obeyed His earthly parents, as far as possible, without breaking any of God's laws. (Luke 2:51) Where and how did Jesus have access to Scripture?
8. After His baptism, He went into the wilderness and refused to violate the first commandment by worshiping Satan. (Luke 4:8) The one commandment which is most widely ignored is the

Sabbath commandment; and yet, we have clear Scriptures that say that Jesus kept it on a regular basis. (Luke 4:16) Philippians 2:5-11 suggests that He carefully obeyed all of God's commandments. (Compare Hebrews 4:15.) Jesus Himself stated that He had kept all of His Father's commandments (John 15:10) and even challenged the Sanhedrin to see if they could truly find any sin in Him. (John 8:46)

9. But, what about the new commandment that Jesus gave in John 13:34-35? What is actually new about that commandment? In the Old Testament, we are told to love others as we love ourselves. But, Jesus said that a new standard had been raised! We are not to just love others as we love ourselves; we are to love others as He has loved us!

At the time when these words were spoken, the disciples could not understand them; but after they had witnessed the sufferings of Christ, after His crucifixion and resurrection, and ascension to heaven, and after the Holy Spirit had rested on them at Pentecost, they had a clearer conception of the love of God and of the nature of that love which they must have for one another. (*Acts of the Apostles* 5:47.1) (Compare John 17:20-23.)

10. Christ literally gave His life and died the second death for us. In what way could we possibly die as Christians? (1 John 3:16) Should church members be dying for other church members? Don't we need to die to our selfish, sinful practices? We need to bury the old man of sin and live the new kind of life that Jesus has offered us.
11. No doubt, Paul was the biblical author who wrote in most detail about observing the law. So, how should we understand 1 Corinthians 9:19-23? When Paul was with Gentiles, did he feel free to break one or more of the Ten Commandments? What did he mean by saying that when he was with Gentiles, he lived like a Gentile? It should be obvious by reading on in the passage that if Paul was trying by all means to win as many as possible, he would not violate the very laws he was trying to convince them to keep! What kind of an example would that be? However, there are cultural differences. You might even call some of them cultural barriers that can be a hindrance to some in accepting the gospel. So, what did Paul mean when he said he was under Christ's law? Was that a new law?
12. It is very interesting to review what Paul said about the formerly-pagan Christians in Romans 1. Then he turned to Romans 2 and wrote about the formerly-Jewish Christians who were being tempted to look down their noses and condemn those formerly-pagan Christians. He made it clear that by doing so, they were worse!
13. By talking about a new "law of Christ," wasn't Paul suggesting that we are supposed to love everyone and not just a select group of friends? Try to imagine what a challenge that must have been for Paul who had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees! Do you think it was easy for him to set aside his former prejudices? How much self-denial did Paul, the former Pharisee, have to exercise to work among Gentiles? Are we willing to set aside our selfishness by denying self and truly practicing love for God and love for our fellow man?
14. As Paul said, we must admit that many of the Gentiles had not been aware of the Ten Commandments. However, based on what he said in Romans 1:20 and 2:12-16, he thought that they had enough of the truth revealed to them in nature so as to be aware of God's requirements. How does that work in communist China? He still believed that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) As a result, unless we change our behavior, we are doomed to destruction. (Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4) Fortunately for us, through Christ's gift we have a new way to salvation. (Ephesians 2:8)
15. How does the grace of Christ empower you to live a new life like Jesus? (Romans 6:15; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11-14) Has the grace of Christ changed your life?

16. Read Galatians 6:1-5. What do you think about the fact that we were created for good deeds? How is it that we are supposed to bear one another's burdens? Is this just talking about times when our fellow Christians are caught in sin and we are supposed to love them back into obedience to God's law? All of us have our moments of weakness. How did Jesus respond to sinners who were brought to Him? (See John 8:1-11.) Many examples could be given of His incredible kindness and graciousness in dealing with our weaknesses.

17. Notice these words from Ellen White.

Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. (*The Desire of Ages* 353.1)

Could we do that? If so, how do we get to be like that?

18. If there were no hope of a future life and no real incentive for obeying God's commandments, perhaps we could be excused in sinning. But, the gift of eternal life being offered to us and even the promise of a better life here and now gives us every possible incentive for living a Christ-like life. We very much appreciate any grace and kindness shown to us when we are in error. Are we willing to extend the same grace and kindness to others?

19. The time will definitely come when God's law will be the standard by which He judges the world. That judgment will apply fairly to everyone no matter what time period or what place in the world he lives/lived. Eventually, however, He will have to say: "Whoever is evil must go on doing evil, and whoever is filthy must go on being filthy; whoever is good must go on doing good, and whoever is holy must go on being holy." (Revelation 22:11, *GNB*)

20. Read Revelation 14:6-7. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have taken Revelation 14:6-12 as our special mandate. However, there are many other texts in Scripture talking about judgment. (See Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1; and 2 Corinthians 5:10.) There are many Christians who feel very relieved by the idea that Jesus is our Judge instead of the Father! They draw this conclusion from reading John 5:22,30. But, elsewhere in the same Gospel, John made it very clear how the judgment works. John 3:17-21 and 12:47-48 state the facts very plainly. We are judged by the truth.

21. What do you think about this statement in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*?

The fact that Christ has been assigned the responsibility of judgment demonstrates the mercy of God. Because Christ has become one with the human race, He is in a position to judge impartially.

22. Is that suggesting that the Father would not be capable of judging impartially? Is there something faulty with His knowledge of humanity? The idea so commonly expressed in various forms that the Father is the harsh, severe Judge and that Jesus must plead with Him to convince Him to forgive us is absolutely pagan! John 16:25-26 says that Jesus will not plead with the Father for us since the Father Himself loves us. There is no separation between the Members of the deity. The Father thinks and feels about us exactly the way the Son does.

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that

we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed. . . . In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father. (*That I May Know Him* 338.4)

23. When we sin, we are destroying ourselves. We are violating the laws of mind and body.
24. Let us be clear. The law is not some kind of checklist that we need to work on to try to obtain God's favor. The law is a description of how love is supposed to operate. And ultimately, when we come to understand why God has asked us to do these things and we begin to realize that God has never asked us to do anything which is not for our best good, then the law becomes a law that sets us free. (James 2:12)
25. Unfortunately, like Satan himself, we are incredibly good at deceiving ourselves. We always make excuses for our own failures while at the same time tend to condemn others for theirs. Of course, Jesus did not commit sin. Nevertheless, He was incredibly gracious to sinners with whom He came in contact.
26. Think of people in the Bible who committed terrible sins; and yet, God continued to work with them. Moses was a murderer. David not only killed many people but also committed a terrible sin was Bathsheba. Paul killed many Christians. And yet, these men were shining examples of what God can do with human beings under the right circumstances.
27. So, what about it? Is keeping the commandments a burden? Or, do we recognize the principles involved and choose to do right because it is right? Isn't that what Jesus did? Was there anything that He did during His ministry on this earth that was a violation of any of the Ten Commandments? He repeatedly set aside the rules of the Pharisees. But, He did so to try to clear away the rubbish from God's true law.
28. The word *love* is used to describe so many things in our English language. While we cannot discuss all those issues at this time, we need to point out that love is not just a feeling. Gary Chapman has written a book entitled, *The Love Languages of God*. In it he described ways in which we might express our love. Perhaps by giving a gift, by offering words of encouragement, by spending some quality time, or perhaps providing some practical help, or even a physical touch. At which of these love languages are you best? At which are you not good?
29. It is interesting to notice that the Ten Commandments as expressed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are spelled out in considerably more detail in Leviticus 19. In Leviticus 19 there are examples of how the Israelites, specifically, and the rest of us as well, are to keep those commandments.
30. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about how Christians are supposed to live. Read Matthew 5:43. Where did Jesus get the idea that we are supposed to hate our enemies? Was that one of the rules the Pharisees had set up? The standards described in the Sermon on the Mount seem to many to be nearly impossible. But, as we observe and try to practice what we see in the life of Christ, things change. The time has come for Christians to really be like Christ. With God's help can we do it?

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