

Christ and His Law

Christ, the Law and the Gospel

Lesson #9 for May 31, 2014

Scriptures: Romans 7:7-12; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Matthew 7:24-27; Acts 10:34-35; John 15:10; Ephesians 2:1.

1. More than 100 years before Christ, a Roman poet named Lucretius wrote a famous poem entitled, "On the Nature of Things." He strongly believed that by virtue of their being gods, the gods would have absolutely no interest in anything human.
2. What a contrast between that and the true God! There is only one God, and He cares deeply about what happens to us. Both His law and the plan of salvation show His love for humanity.
3. Is there a direct relationship between law and sin? Read Romans 7:7-12. What makes a sin sinful? Is something wrong or sinful because it is opposed to the very nature of reality in a universe ruled by a God of love? Or, is a sin a sin because someone has declared it so? As we studied in a previous lesson, are God's laws descriptive or proscriptive?
4. There are many laws on the record books of nations that are foolish and even make us laugh. But, no doubt, at one time, they seemed to be necessary. There are even laws that are morally wrong. At one time in the United States, it was a law that one must return an escaped slave to his/her owner. In some countries today, there are things which are illegal for women to do but are perfectly legal for men to do—like driving a car. And there are some things which are legal to do in one country that are not legal to do in another country. In some countries it is against the law to change one's religion. Ultimately, in the wider context of the great controversy throughout the universe, sin is anything which destroys or diminishes our relationship with our fellow human beings or with God. (Romans 14:23)
5. Read Romans 7:7. Why was Paul particularly pointing out the tenth commandment in this verse? Was it because coveting is worse than any other sin? Or, is it possible that coveting is worse because all sin begins in our minds? Furthermore, it is much easier to hide selfishness and covetousness from others—and from ourselves! When Paul thought about the law, he recognized that he could observe the first nine of the commandments. And he could point out to others the fact that he was keeping the law of God.
6. But, when he looked more carefully at the tenth commandment, he realized that God was setting forth rules even about what we can think in our "hearts" and minds! It made him angry! He felt that at least our thoughts should be free from any judgment on God's part. But, then he recognized that it would not be safe to admit to heaven people who have such sinful thoughts. Sooner or later, those sinful thoughts would break out in sinful behavior. Thus, he recognized that by preventing future sin in heaven, the tenth commandment is a safeguard for all who go there.
7. Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20. It was certainly clear in Moses's mind that obedience was linked to life and disobedience was linked to death. He recognized that the children of Israel had been chosen to occupy the center of the then-known world in order to be a witness to all who should pass through their territory.
8. Israel was not chosen because they were the largest of all nations or even because they were saints because, clearly, they were not either. Perhaps, they were chosen because God recognized that they would clearly demonstrate both the benefits of obedience and the damaging consequences of sin. Unfortunately, as we know from history, Israel

continually tried to claim the blessings without meeting the requirements. As they were drawn deeper and deeper into the fertility cult religions of the nations around them, they certainly could not claim any longer to be God's faithful people.

9. Read Acts 10:34-35; 17:26-27; Romans 1:20; and 2:14. Many other examples could be given, even from the Old Testament, suggesting that it was God's plan that the gospel should be carried to all the world. Israel was supposed to be a witnessing nation. But, despite Israel's failures, God did not leave the people of other nations totally without hope. God is revealed in nature, and human beings feel an actual need for something beyond themselves. Who was the only Bible author who was not a Hebrew? Luke, a Greek.
10. Read Romans 1:18. How well do we represent God? Are any of us guilty of suppressing the truth? As parents, do we ever misrepresent God to our children? Remember that children, especially when they are younger, regard us as symbols of God. How well are we as a church doing at representing God to the world?
11. Read John 1:17. Notice that in the *King James Version* the word *but* is in italics. This means that it is not present in the original documents. It was not John's intention to contrast the law as given by Moses to the grace and truth which come through Jesus Christ. Both the law which came really from God but was transmitted to us through Moses and the grace and truth which came directly from Jesus Christ are essential to our relationship with God. Each of us who has some knowledge about God is responsible for sharing that knowledge with others.
12. Whereas all of us have lived sinful lives, Jesus never sinned. (Philippians 2:8; John 15:10; and Matthew 26:39) We were shut out of the Garden of Eden because of the sin of our first parents. We now have the possibility of reentering the Garden of Eden through the life, death, and ministry of Jesus Christ. **Do we clearly understand how His life and death have answered all the questions in the great controversy?**
13. Read Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8. Why is salvation regarded as a free gift? There are at least two main reasons: 1) There is no way we could do anything to save ourselves and earn our way to heaven. And, 2) God has already provided all the necessary answers and given us the necessary Example to follow. Nothing we can do could possibly add to that.

Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not [20] possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him. (*Ms 36*, 1890, pp. 2,3. "Danger of False Ideas on Justification by Faith"; *3MR* 420.3; *Faith and Works* 19.3)

14. How does that passage fit with your idea of salvation?
15. Read Romans 1:16-17. Why do you think Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel"?

Shouldn't he have said, "I am proud of the gospel"? How do you suppose the death of Jesus, who died on a cross supposedly as a traitor to the Roman government, was viewed by Romans and other people of the Mediterranean world in those days? As suggested by Paul in 1 Corinthians, it would seem completely foolish to Greeks. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

16. Think about it for a moment. If you lived in the days of Jesus and a relative of yours or perhaps a close friend was found to be a traitor to the Roman government and, therefore, was crucified, would you want to admit a close relationship with him/her?
17. But, there is one incredible fact that cannot be ignored about that story. Jesus came forth from His grave! Doesn't that change the whole story? Our natural lives lead to death. Our bodies naturally deteriorate to death, and we are spiritually dead apart from God's plan of salvation. (Romans 6:23; 7:24; and Ephesians 2:1)
18. To many Christians the good news is that as bad as we are as sinners, we can be saved through the generous gift of God. While that is certainly good news or gospel, it is just the beginning of the story. Would you even want to be saved if God were the kind of Person Satan has accused Him of being? Would you want to live forever with an arbitrary, exacting, unforgiving tyrant or despot? Of course not. So, if God is not the kind of Person that was revealed by the life and death of Jesus, who would even want to be saved? In that light the real gospel is the truth about God's character and His government.
19. For generations, there has been an ongoing discussion among Christians about the relative merits of *special revelation* versus *general revelation*. Read Acts 4:12 in contrast to Romans 1:20; 2:14; and Acts 17:26-27. While Christians have felt strongly about the necessity of coming to know God through Jesus Christ, there have been millions and millions of people who have lived and died without ever hearing of the gospel or even the name of Jesus. How will God judge them? What might they see in nature or perhaps in human experience that teaches them about God? Do we really need to know about Jesus Christ and choose to follow Him personally in order to be saved as special revelation teaches?
20. We have already suggested that there is nothing that we can do to earn our salvation. So, if salvation is a gift of God, how does He decide to whom He is going to give it? And if, in fact, people who have never heard about Jesus can be saved, why do we bother to send missionaries or even evangelists to try to convince them about the truth?
21. There are many apparently contradictory ideas in Christianity. How is it that Jesus dying a very shameful death on a cross can free us from shame? If salvation is a completely free gift of God, why is it necessary for us to keep the law? Or, is it? (Romans 2) What is the relationship between faith and obedience?
22. **Do we really think and act as if the gospel is the best good news that we have ever heard?** Think of a time when you received some really good news. How did you respond? Do we tend to keep quiet about good news?
23. Read Romans 3:1-4. Why was Israel chosen as God's special people? What exactly was the role of the priests in the Old Testament? Clearly, they could not all be working at the tabernacle or later at the temple all the time. They were scattered throughout the country in the cities of refuge and in the other cities given to their tribe. Was it God's purpose that they be teachers to the people? Do we have evidence in the rest of Scripture that they actually did that?
24. Was there ever a time when Israel's faithful observance of God's directions was a true example to the surrounding nations? Did that occur during the reign of David? Or, even in

the early reign of Solomon? Has there ever been a time when the following prophecy was true?

Micah 4:1-2 (GNB): In days to come

the mountain where the Temple stands
will be the highest one of all,
towering above all the hills.

Many nations will come streaming to it,
² and their people will say,

“Let us go up the hill of the LORD,
to the Temple of Israel’s God.

He will teach us what he wants us to do;
we will walk in the paths he has chosen.

For the LORD’s teaching comes from Jerusalem;
from Zion he speaks to his people.”

Compare Isaiah 2:2-4. Who borrowed from whom?

25. Read Luke 4:16-30. Not only were the Israelites in Jesus’s day not witnessing to other nations, but also even mentioning the fact that Someone had helped people from other nations perhaps in preference to helping an Israelite was so offensive that the people of Jesus’s hometown wanted to kill Him when He did mention it!
26. So, how about it? Are we as a Seventh-day Adventist Church doing better than the Israelites did in ancient times? Do we as individuals correctly represent the gospel to those around us? How could we do better?

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Info@theox.org

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