

The Teachings of Jesus

The Law of God

Lesson #10 for September 6, 2014

Scriptures: Matthew 5:17-19; 5:21-24; 19:16-22; Mark 7:9-13.

1. What comes to your mind when someone says, “The law of God”? The question about law versus grace has been a prominent one throughout Christian history. What did Jesus teach regarding the law and its impact on our lives?
2. What was the attitude of the Pharisees toward the law? They had memorized the law. Why were they always arguing with Jesus about the way He kept the law? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it very clear what He believed should be the correct attitude toward keeping the law. More than one and one-half years into His ministry, (See John 1-4.) Jesus left Judea because John the Baptist had been arrested and they were trying to arrest Jesus as well. He moved to Galilee and established His home, once again, at Capernaum. Soon thereafter, He officially called His 12 disciples. Having called the 12, it was time for Him to lay out His plan for His ministry in Galilee. He did so by presenting what we call the Sermon on the Mount.
3. Many of the points in His sermon flew directly in the face of the teachings of the Pharisees and the common beliefs of the people. Does that sound like the best way for a young rabbi/teacher/pastor to begin His ministry? Can you antagonize and instruct at the same time? Read Matthew 5:17-19. Having given the Beatitudes, Jesus recognized that what He was saying would seem to almost everyone listening to be contradicting the teachings of the Old Testament. So, He stated in unequivocal terms that it was not His purpose to overthrow the teachings of the Old Testament. Recognizing how far the Jewish teachers had corrupted the true teachings of the Old Testament, Jesus was trying to present the truth as it was originally intended. The New Testament, of course, had not yet been written.
4. What does it mean to fulfill the law? When speaking of *the law*, the Jews often meant the five books of Moses. But, in this passage, it seems clear that Jesus was focusing particularly on the Ten Commandments.
5. How do you interpret Jesus’s repeated statement, “It was said of old, . . . but I say . . .”? As a young rabbi, did He have the right to overturn their understanding of the law? What was Jesus’s real relationship to the law?
6. Many modern Christians have suggested that the God of the Old Testament was the harsh, exacting, arbitrary Father-God. By contrast, they love to talk about the loving, caring, forgiving God of the New Testament which they, of course, recognize as Jesus. Where did that idea come from? Who was the God of the Old Testament? Look at some passages in the New Testament. Luke 4:16-21 talks of the time when Jesus went back to Nazareth and gave a sermon in the synagogue. Having read the Scripture from Isaiah 61:1-2—Where did Jesus learn to read Hebrew?—He then openly stated that that passage which they all recognized as describing the Messiah was being fulfilled before their eyes. When they realized what He was implying, they wanted to kill Him. (DA 164.3; 287.1; John 5:18)
7. Read Luke 24:44. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and said (GNB): “These are the very things I told you about when I was still with you: everything written about me in the law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms had to come true.” In these words, He was clearly stating that He was the God of the Old Testament.
8. Compare John 5:39 (GNB): “You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me!”

9. Stephen recognized the truth about the Messiah being the God of the Old Testament when he said, as recorded in Acts 7:38: “He is the one who was with the people of Israel assembled in the desert; he was there with our ancestors and with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and he received God’s living messages to pass on to us.” (GNB)
10. The apostle Paul wanted to make that very clear to his readers. After describing the experience of the children of Israel with Moses in the wilderness, he stated in 1 Corinthians 10:3-4: “All ate the same spiritual bread and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from the spiritual rock that went with them; and that rock was Christ himself.” (GNB)
11. What did Ellen White say about this issue? *Patriarchs and Prophets* 362.2-3.

Christ was not only the leader of the Hebrews in the wilderness--the Angel in whom was the name of Jehovah, and who, veiled in the cloudy pillar, went before the host--but it was He who gave the law to Israel. Amid the awful glory of Sinai, Christ declared in the hearing of all the people the ten precepts of His Father’s law. It was He who gave to Moses the law engraved upon the tables of stone. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 366.2)

It is the voice of Christ that speaks to us through the Old Testament. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 366.3)

It was Christ who, amid thunder and flame, had proclaimed the law upon Mount Sinai. The glory of God, like devouring fire, rested upon its summit, and the mountain quaked at the presence of the Lord. The hosts of Israel, lying prostrate upon the earth, had listened in awe to the sacred precepts of the law. What a contrast to the scene upon the mount of the Beatitudes! Under the summer sky, with no sound to break the stillness but the song of birds, Jesus unfolded the principles of His kingdom. Yet He who spoke to the people that day in accents of love, was opening to them the principles of the law proclaimed upon Sinai.—White, E. G. (1896). *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 45.1.

He knew that spies stood ready to seize upon every word that might be wrested to serve their purpose. He knew the prejudice that existed in the minds of many of His hearers, and He said nothing to unsettle their faith in the religion and institutions that had been committed to them through Moses. **Christ Himself had given both the moral and the ceremonial law.** He did not come to destroy confidence in His own instruction. It was because of His great reverence for the law and the prophets that He sought to break through the wall of traditional requirements which hemmed in the Jews. While He set aside their false interpretations of the law, He carefully guarded His disciples against yielding up the vital truths committed to the Hebrews. —White, E. G. (1898), *The Desire of Ages*, 307.2. [Bold type is added.]

12. No wonder Jesus felt comfortable in saying, “You have heard that it was said by them of old time... But I say unto you.” (NKJV) Since He was the God of the Old Testament, He had the perfect right to interpret His own words for the crowd listening to Him that day.
13. So, why do so many Christians think that it is okay to set aside the Ten Commandments of God based on their understanding of the teachings of Jesus? Is there any hint in the Gospels that Jesus was trying to set aside His own words given on Mount Sinai?
14. Read Exodus 20:13-14; Deuteronomy 5:17-18; Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. Jesus quoted these passages from the Old Testament and then appeared to argue against them as if they were wrong. But, He was not arguing against the actual teachings from the Old Testament. Instead, He was arguing against the

interpretation that have been placed on those teachings by the Pharisees and the scribes. Look specifically at the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees as described in Matthew 23:3-5,23-28. At the wall in Jerusalem, the Jews still teach people how to put on phylacteries.

15. Jesus was pointing out that the Pharisees' religion was specifically designed for outward show. They wanted to convince the other Israelites that they were saints.
16. But, how should we interpret these new standards set by Jesus? Read Matthew 5:27-28. Does this seem like an impossible standard? It is impossible to avoid suggestive materials today! Do you know of any Christian who has slipped up in his/her observance of the law? Has s/he taken out an eye or cut off a hand? How are we to understand Matthew 5:29-30?

In verses 29 and 30 Christ was using a figure of speech. Of course, one could argue that it would be better to go through life mutilated than to forfeit eternity with Christ. However, rather than pointing to mutilation, which would be contrary to other biblical teachings (see *Lev. 19:27, 28; 21:17-20*), Jesus was referring to the control of one's thoughts and impulses. In His references to plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand, Christ was figuratively speaking of the importance of taking resolute decisions and actions toward guarding oneself against temptation and sin.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, September 2.

17. In the final weeks and months of Jesus's ministry on this earth, the Pharisees, the scribes, and even the Sadducees sought by every possible means to trip Him up and to get Him to say something that they thought they could use to condemn Him.

18. Read Deuteronomy 24:1 and Matthew 19:3-12.

In Jesus' days there were two rabbinic schools that interpreted this text [Deuteronomy 24:1] in two different ways: Hillel understood it to allow divorce for almost any reason, while Shammai interpreted it to mean only explicit adultery. The Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus into taking sides with one school or the other.—*Ibid.* [Content in brackets is added.]

19. But, as always, Jesus was one step ahead of them. He reminded them of how was it back in the beginning. What was God's original intention for marriage? While God had allowed the Israelites to divorce their wives legally, it was only necessary because of the hardness of their hearts and the stiffness of their necks. What do you think Jesus would say to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 21st century? Should we take Jesus's words seriously about plucking out eyes or cutting off hands? That sounds crazy to us? Is it really scary? Should it be? Is it possible for God to scare us into doing what is right? If so, why didn't He do it with Lucifer in the beginning?
20. Jesus also raised questions about the keeping of the fifth commandment which instructs us to honor our parents. When the scribes and the Pharisees began to criticize how Jesus and His disciples were not correctly washing their hands before eating, Jesus pointed out how they had directly contradicted the fifth commandment by their practice of *Corban*. (See Mark 7:9-13.)
21. The Pharisees seemed to argue endlessly about the priority of the laws given by God in the Old Testament. They could think up multiple examples when one law might appear to be in conflict with another law. And if they could establish that the first law was—in their opinion—more important than the second law, they thought that was an adequate reason for them to ignore the second law.
22. Do we have subtle little ways of producing “technical loopholes” in order to try to avoid doing what we know the law specifically says we should do?

23. There is a very sad story told Matthew 19:16-22. Jesus had just been laying His hands on children as mothers brought them to Him for His blessing. A rich young ruler—we do not know exactly what his position was; but, he may have been a member the Sanhedrin—still felt a spiritual emptiness in his life. He thought that if perhaps Jesus would bless him as He blessed the children, then his spiritual emptiness would go away. Jesus recognized that this young man would be a great asset to the cause. But, He knew that there was a plague spot in his character. It was his money. In order to understand the story, we need to understand how wealth was regarded in Jesus's day. Based on the teachings of Deuteronomy 28, it was assumed that if one was wealthy, he was obviously being blessed by God; and therefore, he must be a saint. So, when Jesus told this young man to sell everything he had and give the money to poor, He was asking that young man to give away the proof of his righteousness! Was that fair? Jesus did not require that of Nicodemus, or the disciples. What about the riches of Abraham, David, Solomon, and Job?

24. But, Jesus recognized that this young man's wealth was his god. Jesus knew that full and complete obedience and surrender to God was essential for living a true Christian life. He knew that soon His disciples would be scattered throughout the then-known world preaching the gospel, living almost pennilessly, and eventually being martyred. The rich young ruler would have to adjust his priorities to fit with that crowd!

Nothing short of obedience can be accepted. Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ. Often it is presented and enjoined in language that seems authoritative, because there is no other way to save man than to cut away those things which, if entertained, will demoralize the whole being.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.3.

25. So, in all of this, we see that Jesus very carefully and consistently upheld not only the Ten Commandments but also all of the Old Testament.

Speaking of the law, Jesus said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" . . . ; that is, to fill up the measure of the law's requirement, to give an example of perfect conformity to the will of God. . . .

His mission was to "magnify the law, and make it honorable." Isaiah 42:21. He was to show the spiritual nature of the law, to present its far-reaching principles, and to make plain its eternal obligation. . . .

Jesus, the express image of the Father's person, the effulgence of His glory; the self-denying Redeemer, throughout His pilgrimage of love on earth was a living representation of the character of the law of God. In His life it is made manifest that heaven-born love, Christlike principles, underlie the laws of eternal rectitude.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, 48.3-49.2.

26. We know that most of the challenges in modern times against the keeping of the Ten Commandments are specifically attempts to do away with the seventh-day Sabbath. Can you find anything in the Gospels or in the teachings of the New Testament that directly suggest that the law of God from the Old Testament should be set aside?

27. Jesus performed several miracles on the Sabbath, and He did them in ways directly defying the rules which the Pharisees had set up. Does that mean He was trying to do away with the Sabbath? Not at all! He was trying to reestablish a correct keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. He was trying to do away with their pile of rules.

28. Jesus died to demonstrate the truth about God's character, His government, and the importance of strict obedience to God's law. God does not change. (See Malachi 3:6 and 1 Samuel 15:29; but, compare 1 Samuel 15:10,11,35.) The permanence of God's law

demonstrates the orderliness of God's government and even of His universe. Human laws may change; but, God's laws are permanent. Consider some modern examples. How have secular laws have changed about divorce and remarriage and even about homosexuality? Should Seventh-day Adventists teach that God's law changes to meet changing conditions in society? Do we worship a chameleon God? Or, should we regard the laws given so many years ago from Mount Sinai as out of date?

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 315.1. [Bold type is added.]

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