

Present Truth in Deuteronomy Law and Grace

Lesson #7 for November 13, 2021

Scriptures: Ezekiel 28:15-16; Deuteronomy 4:44; 5:6-22; 9:1-6; 10:1-15; Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:21.

1. How should we understand the following passages in Scripture?

1 John 3:4: Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and **sin is lawlessness.**—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update.** (1995). (1 John 3:4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.†

Galatians 3:22: But the scripture says that **the whole world is under the power of sin**; and so the gift which is promised on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ is given to those who believe.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Galatians 3:22). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].†

Ephesians 2:8-9: ⁸⁻⁹For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. **It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

Romans 3:23: **Everyone has sinned** and is far away from God's saving presence.—*Good News Bible.*†*

Romans 6:23: **For sin pays its wage—death**; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible.*†*

2. If what we have just read is true, then it is clear that if it were not for God's grace, every one of us should die because we are all sinners. Most Christians would admit these scriptural truths, perhaps grudgingly. Of course, many Seventh-day Adventists will rush to mention the seventh-day Sabbath, which, while it is clearly a part of the Ten Commandments, is ignored by most. But, that is not our main subject for this week.
3. What is the relationship between God's law—what He asks us to follow—and His grace which is what He does when we do not do what He asks us to do?
4. As we have studied before, love can only occur in the context of freedom. "Love" or "obedience" that is somehow forced or coerced is not love or obedience at all.

Romans 7:7: Shall we say, then, that the Law itself is sinful? Of course not! **But it was the Law that made me know what sin is.** If the Law had not said, "Do not desire what belongs to someone else," I would not have known such a desire.—*Good News Bible.*†* [Aren't those desires normal for sinners?][‡]

5. Might the same idea, at least in principle, exist in heaven where moral beings—i.e., angels—exist, as well?
6. In heaven, love is the dominant principle in every action. We read these words about Satan when he chose to rebel:

Ezekiel 28:15-16: ¹⁵“Your conduct was perfect from the day you were created until you began to do evil. ¹⁶You were busy buying and selling, and this led you to violence and sin. So I forced you to leave my holy mountain, and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the sparkling gems.”—*Good News Bible.** [The prince/ruler/king of Tyre was a symbol for Lucifer/Satan.][‡]

7. Our entire universe operates according to strict laws. From the minutest subatomic particles to the largest galaxies, the heavens obey laws like the law of gravity. But, moral law applies only to those who have the ability to think and choose, and thus, have freedom.

8. Look at these words from Ellen White.

The will of God is expressed in the precepts of His holy law, and the principles of this law are the principles of heaven. **The angels of heaven attain unto no higher knowledge than to know the will of God, and to do His will is the highest service that can engage their powers.**

But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy. So in every soul wherein Christ, the hope of glory, dwells, His words are re-echoed, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing** [abbreviated as *MB*] 109.1-2.† [Doing God's will is always right!][‡]

9. Satan and his followers had to leave heaven because they refused to live in an atmosphere dominated by love.
10. We are studying the book of Deuteronomy. What is the relationship between grace and the law in the book of Deuteronomy? Many, many verses in Deuteronomy suggest that God: (1) Delivered them out of the land of Egypt—a feat which they never could have accomplished by themselves, (2) Took them through the Red Sea on dry land, and then (3) Spoke to them from Sinai. Nothing like that has ever happened to any other nation.
11. But, notice the very specific instructions given in Deuteronomy 17:15-19.

Deuteronomy 17:15-19: ¹⁵ "Make sure that the man you choose to be king is the one whom the LORD has chosen. He must be one of your own people; do not make a foreigner your king. ¹⁶**The king is not to have a large number of horses for his army, and he is not to send people to Egypt to buy horses, because the LORD has said that his people are never to return there.** ¹⁷**The king is not to have many wives, because this would make him turn away from the LORD; and he is not to make himself rich with silver and gold.** ¹⁸**When he becomes king, he is to have a copy of the book of God's laws and teachings made from the original copy kept by the levitical priests.** ¹⁹**He is to keep this book near him and read from it all his life, so that he will learn to honour the LORD and to obey faithfully everything that is commanded in it.** ²⁰**This will keep him from thinking that he is better than his fellow-Israelites and from disobeying the LORD's commands in any way. Then he will reign for many years, and his descendants will rule Israel for many generations.**"—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Critical scholars believe that not even God can predict the future. So, they say these words must have been written 1000 years after Moses.][‡]

12. Just imagine how different things would now be if Israel had always followed these directions! Did Jesus try to explain some of these things to His disciples?
13. But, there were warnings.

Deuteronomy 28:58-63: ⁵⁸ "If you do not obey faithfully all God's teachings that are written in this book and if you do not honour the wonderful and awesome name of the LORD your God, ⁵⁹he will send on you and on your descendants incurable diseases and horrible epidemics that can never be stopped. ⁶⁰He will bring on you once again all the dreadful diseases you

experienced in Egypt, and you will never recover. ⁶¹He will also send all kinds of diseases and epidemics that are not mentioned in this book of God's laws and teachings, and you will be destroyed. ⁶²Although you become as numerous as the stars in the sky, only a few of you will survive, because you did not obey the LORD your God. ⁶³Just as the LORD took delight in making you prosper and in making you increase in number, so he will take delight in destroying you and in bringing ruin on you. You will be uprooted from the land that you are about to occupy."—*Good News Bible*.*† [See also Deuteronomy 32:45-46 and 33:2.]‡

14. Why do blessings come on those who obey God? Why do curses come on those who do not? Is it because God is actively blessing some and cursing others? Or, could it be that doing what God commands is the right thing to do; and, therefore, it brings "blessings"? Could it be that disobeying God is not doing what is best; so, it leads to curses and losses? In trying to explain what happened at that serious, even disastrous, General Conference session in 1888, (See the preceding paragraphs in this letter cited.) Ellen White explained the issue very clearly, writing:

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.

The law is an expression of God's idea. When we receive it in Christ, it becomes our idea. It lifts us above the power of natural desires and tendencies, above temptations that lead to sin. "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165)—cause them to stumble.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,* Book 1, [abbreviated as *1SM*] 235.1-3.†‡

15. **After all the things that God had done for the children of Israel, He asked them to do just one thing: Obey and follow His guidance because it was the right thing to do. Indeed, it was for their best good. When they went to war following God's directions, they won without any problems and sometimes without the loss of a single soldier. When they went to war without God's help, it was a disaster.**
16. Could that whole set of ideas apply to us in our day? Do we obey the law because God's grace has saved us? Or, do we obey the law in order to receive God's grace? If we could earn God's salvation, it would no longer be by grace!
17. Deuteronomy is almost a lesson in grace and law. God does everything for us from creating us to redeeming us to protecting us and guiding us, etc. and, then, He turns and says: "Please, for your own good, obey My guiding principles in the law."
18. Many skeptics suggest that the God of the Old Testament was harsh, vindictive, even mean-spirited. **By contrast, they think that Jesus was loving and kind. They have failed**

to read and understand 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Luke 24:44; and John 5:39 which say that Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament!

19. So, what does God actually say in Deuteronomy that should guide us in this direction?

Deuteronomy 10:12-15: ¹² “Now, people of Israel, listen to what the LORD your God demands of you: worship the LORD and do all that he commands. Love him, serve him with all your heart, ¹³and **obey all his laws. I am giving them to you today for your benefit.** ¹⁴To the LORD belong even the highest heavens; the earth is his also, and everything on it. ¹⁵But the LORD’s love for your ancestors was so strong that he chose you instead of any other people, and you are still his chosen people.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

20. Many people find this idea hard to believe because they somehow believe that what they want to do is what is good for them! That is not true! What God wants for them is what is good for them! That idea is so hard for us as selfish people to accept!

21. It is interesting to note that God’s directions in Deuteronomy are addressed to individual believers. Most of the commands are in the singular form in the Hebrew; but, God recognized that while He was directing an entire nation, each person had to make up his/her own mind whether or not s/he was going to follow His will.

22. Do we really believe that all that God wants is what is best for us? Always? Sometimes, the laws are compared to a hedge or wall of protection, as we noted earlier in the words of Ellen White. God’s law is simply a prescription for those who want to live the happiest, most successful, most fulfilling kinds of lives.

23. If we had time, we could look all through the Old Testament and find many examples in which God mentioned His delivering the people out of the land of Egypt, and that was the reason why they should obey Him. The same ideas are found in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4: I want you to remember, my brothers and sisters, what happened to our ancestors who followed Moses. They were all under the protection of the cloud, and all passed safely through the Red Sea. ²In the cloud and in the sea they were all baptized as followers of Moses. ³All ate the same spiritual bread ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from the spiritual rock that went with them; and **that rock was Christ himself.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Compare Hebrews 11:29.] [**Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament!**][‡]

24. But, there is a problem in Deuteronomy 5. Look especially at verse 15 and verse 22. These verses read together and understood superficially seem to suggest that the Sabbath was given only for the benefit of the Jews because they were the ones who were rescued from slavery in Egypt. We were not rescued from Egypt! But, we know that the Sabbath was given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, long before there was any Jew!

25. So, let us re-state the idea that we keep the Sabbath because God created us, and He gave us those instructions back in the Garden of Eden. But, He also emphasized the fact that He wants to save us by reminding us of what He did for the Jews by bringing them out of Egypt. This is an addition to—not a replacement of—His original command in the Garden of Eden.

26. And what has been the attitude of many toward the Sabbath?

Hebrews 4:1-5: ⁴ Now, God has offered us the promise that we may receive that rest he spoke about. Let us take care, then, that none of you will be found to have failed to receive that promised rest. ²For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. **They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith.** ³We who believe, then, do receive that rest which God promised. It is just as he said:

“I was angry and made a solemn promise:

‘They will never enter the land where I would have given them rest!’ ”

He said this even though his work had been finished from the time he created the world. ⁴For somewhere in the Scriptures this is said about the seventh day: “God rested on the seventh day from all his work.” ⁵This same matter is spoken of again: “They will never enter that land where I would have given them rest.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

27. **Thus, the Sabbath is not only a symbol of creation but also a powerful symbol of redemption and grace.**

28. Notice that in the commandment to keep the Sabbath, everyone is commanded to rest—even the strangers within their gates. This is an amplification of the idea that the Sabbath is not just for Jews but also for all with whom they were to come in contact. What God had graciously done for them, they needed to do for others. This principle was spelled out by Christ very clearly in Matthew 18:21-35.

Matthew 18:21-35: ²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?” [Among the Jews six times was considered to be enough!]

²² “No, not seven times,” answered Jesus, “but seventy times seven, ²³because the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants’ accounts. ²⁴He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of pounds. ²⁵The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. ²⁶The servant fell on his knees before the king. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay you everything!’ ²⁷The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go.

²⁸ “Then the man went out and met one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few pounds. He grabbed him and started choking him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he said. ²⁹His fellow-servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!’ ³⁰But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went to the king and told him everything. ³²So he called the servant in. ‘You worthless slave!’ he said. ‘I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. ³³You should have had mercy on your fellow-servant, just as I had mercy on you.’ ³⁴The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount.”

³⁵ And Jesus concluded, “**That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Which treatment is most like God? Forgiving? Or, throwing someone into jail?][‡]

29. But, many strict Christians might respond by saying: “But, surely there is something we can do that makes us better in the eyes of God.” How does that fit with the following statement?

30. Ellen G. White famously expressed it like this:

What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. When they begin to praise and exalt God all the day

long, then by beholding they are becoming changed into the same image. **What is regeneration?**—It is revealing to man what is his own real nature, that in himself he is worthless.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 73*, 1896; [found in] *Manuscript Releases*,* vol. 20, 117.3 [abbreviated as 20MR 117.3]; *Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers (Series A, No. 9, 1896)** 62.2 [abbreviated as SpTA09 62.2].^{††} Compare *The Faith I Live By* 111.2; TM 456.3.

31. Surely, these words leave no room for human boasting or claiming that we can somehow earn our way to heaven. (Compare 1 Corinthians 1:31; Psalm 34:3; and Jeremiah 9:24.)
32. And what did our salvation cost? Looking at the life and especially the sufferings and death of Jesus should humble every one of us.
33. We often focus on God's mighty acts including: (1) Sending the plagues, (2) Taking the children of Israel out of Egypt, (3) Carrying them through the Red Sea on dry land, and (4) Speaking to them from Mount Sinai. And indeed, those were marvelous experiences. But, imagine how much more wonderful it would have been if they had allowed God to lead them all the way into the Promised Land, following His original instructions.

Exodus 23:20-33: ²⁰ [Through Moses, God told the Israelites:] “I will send an angel ahead of you to protect you as you travel and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. ²¹Pay attention to him and obey him. Do not rebel against him, for I have sent him, and he will not pardon such rebellion. ²²**But if you obey him and do everything I command, I will fight against all your enemies.** ²³**My angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will destroy them.** ²⁴Do not bow down to their gods or worship them, and do not adopt their religious practices. Destroy their gods and break down their sacred stone pillars. ²⁵If you worship me, the LORD your God, I will bless you with food and water and take away all your illnesses. ²⁶In your land no woman will have a miscarriage or be without children. I will give you long lives. [What is God planning to do?]

²⁷ **“I will make the people who oppose you afraid of me; I will bring confusion among the people against whom you fight, and I will make all your enemies turn and run from you. ²⁸I will throw your enemies into a panic; I will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites as you advance. ²⁹I will not drive them out within one year; if I did, the land would become deserted, and the wild animals would be too many for you. ³⁰Instead, I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land. ³¹I will make the borders of your land extend from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give you power over the inhabitants of the land, and you will drive them out as you advance. ³²Do not make any agreement with them or with their gods. ³³Do not let those people live in your country; if you do, they will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, it will be a fatal trap for you.”**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

34. And Moses certainly recognized God's original plan when he wrote Deuteronomy 9:1-6.

Deuteronomy 9:1-6: ¹ “Listen, people of Israel! Today you are about to cross the River Jordan and occupy the land belonging to nations greater and more powerful than you. Their cities are large, with walls that reach the sky. ²The people themselves are tall and strong; they are giants, and you have heard it said that no one can stand against them. ³**But now you will see for yourselves that the LORD your God will go ahead of you like a raging fire. He will defeat them as you**

advance, so that you will drive them out and destroy them quickly, as he promised. [Who was to drive them out?]

⁴ “After the LORD your God has driven them out for you, do not say to yourselves that he brought you in to possess this land because you deserved it. No, the LORD is going to drive these people out for you because they are wicked. ⁵It is not because you are good and do what is right that the LORD is letting you take their land. He will drive them out because they are wicked and because he intends to keep the promise that he made to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ⁶You can be sure that the LORD is not giving you this fertile land because you deserve it. **No, you are a stubborn people.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Compare Exodus 32:7-14.][‡]

35. They did not want to have God take care of their enemies. They wanted to do it themselves with their own swords and with their own spears so that they would get the credit in the eyes of their enemies! See Deuteronomy 20:16-18.

36. So, what should we learn from all this about our future? God has a plan; that plan was first established before time began; that plan was for all of us to be saved.

2 Timothy 1:9: He saved us and called us to be his own people, not because of what we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. He gave us this grace by means of Christ Jesus **before the beginning of time.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Can God predict the future? Or, not?][‡]

Titus 1:2: ... which is based on the hope for eternal life. God, who does not lie, promised us this life **before the beginning of time.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

37. Surely, we recognize that if God set up the plan of salvation before the beginning of time, then, nothing we could ever do, or ever have done, could in any way earn our salvation.

38. Moses made that very clear to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 9:5.

Deuteronomy 9:5: “It is not because you are good and do what is right that the LORD is letting you take their land. **He will drive them out because they are wicked and because he intends to keep the promise that he made to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

39. We have seen all that God has done to make it possible for us to be saved. What more could He possibly have done without violating the principles of His loving government? But, God never uses force.

The enemy of Christ, who rebelled against God’s law in heaven, has, as a skilled, trained general, worked with all his power, bringing out one device after another, full of deception, to make of none effect the law of God, the only true detector of sin, the standard of righteousness.—Ellen G. White, “A Peculiar People,” *Review and Herald*,* November 18, 1890, par. 3.

Two trillion galaxies burnish the cosmos. One hundred billion stars comprise each galaxy. That’s 100,000,000,000. Two trillion galaxies, of 100 billion stars each, come to 200,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars.

Now, it’s a principle of existence: whatever conceives of and creates something must be greater than and transcend what it conceived of and created. Picasso is greater than and transcends an artwork by Picasso. The God who conceived of and created our cosmos must be greater than the cosmos and transcend it, as well.

With that in mind, think of the following text:

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“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:1-3, NKJV*).

That is, the God who created all that was created, the 200,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars and everything else—He did what? He “shrank down,” became a human baby, lived a sinless life, then died on the cross, bearing in Himself the penalty for our sins and evil so that we can have the promise of eternal life.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, November 12.[§]

40. So, how would one describe true obedience in contrast to legalism?
41. True obedience happens when followers appreciate what God has done and choose to follow His advice because they recognized its rightness and worth. *Legalism* suggests someone is trying to earn salvation by keeping a set of rules or laws without really understanding why s/he is doing so.
42. So, is it true and can we verify it by experiences in our day, that keeping God’s law results in blessings while disobeying God’s law leads to disaster?
43. However, we need to remember that the day is coming when those who keep the Ten Commandments will be forbidden to buy or sell, and orders will be given to kill them. (Revelation 13:15-18) They will suffer because they do keep the Ten Commandments!
44. Has the truth become clearer in your mind? Do you have a more accurate understanding of the relationship between grace and the law? In the mind of Moses who lived through all those experiences from the time of his return from the land of Midian until they were ready to enter the land of Canaan, it was clear that God had done just about everything He possibly could do for the children of Israel; and yet, they were stiff-necked, rebellious, and had already begun worshipping false gods.
45. Considering all that God has done for us, is it unreasonable to be willing to obey His law even if, currently, we do not fully understand the reasons for every detail of that law?
46. The first law that we know about in Scripture was God’s law that was given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Even in that setting, notice that God first of all told them that they could eat of every tree of the garden freely except the tree of knowledge of what is good and what is evil. God gave them access to the entire garden; then, He asked them to obey.
47. Do God’s laws seem too burdensome to you? Does the yoke seem too heavy? Or, does obeying God’s suggestions for our lives come naturally in response to all that He has done for us?
48. There is a true story told about a committed pastor whose wife fell gravely ill. He prayed repeatedly for her; and yet, his wife never recovered. He became angry at God and decided to leave his ministry because God did not do the miracle he was asking for.
49. How do you relate to God? Do you expect Him to do what you think is best? **Or, might you be willing to allow Him to work things out the way He knows is best?** Are you motivated to keep His commandments? What motivates you to do that?

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