# Contents

1 Laws in Christ’s Day—March 29–April 4 .................................................. 5
2 Christ and the Law of Moses—April 5–11 ................................................. 17
3 Christ and Religious Tradition—April 12–18 .......................................... 29
4 Christ and the Law in the Sermon on the Mount—April 19–25 ................. 41
5 Christ and the Sabbath—April 26–May 2 .................................................. 53
6 Christ’s Death and the Law—May 3–9 ...................................................... 65
7 Christ, the End of the Law—May 10–16 .................................................... 77
9 Christ, the Law and the Gospel—May 24–30 ............................................. 101
10 Christ, the Law and the Covenants—May 31–June 6 ............................ 113
11 The Apostles and the Law—June 7–13 ................................................... 125
12 Christ’s Church and the Law—June 14–20 .............................................. 137
13 Christ’s Kingdom and the Law—June 21–27 ........................................... 149

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From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Why? Because the law, as the foundation of God’s government, expresses the moral integrity of the cosmos, and to overthrow that law would be to overthrow the moral order of the creation itself.

Think about it. If no god existed, and no life either, the universe would be amoral. Not immoral, as in having bad morals, but amoral, as in having no morals, because nothing in it—such as lifeless rocks hurtling through a godless cosmos—could manifest moral qualities.

However, God exists, and humans do as well, and we have been created as moral beings with the capacity to give and to receive love. For this love to exist, however, freedom, *moral* freedom, must exist, too, because love is a moral concept that couldn’t arise in an amoral universe (such as one composed of only rocks and cold space).

Morality, though, means the ability to choose right or wrong, good or evil—and the only way for the universe to be moral, to allow the potential for good or evil, for right or wrong, would be for it to have a law that defines right or wrong.

And, of course, it does have such a law.

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed, I would not have

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**The Law and Love**
known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’ ” (Rom. 7:7, NIV).

Is it sinful to have red hair? Why not? Because God’s law doesn’t forbid red hair. If it did, as the law forbids covetousness, then having red hair would be a sin. But it cannot be a sin if no divine law defines it as such.

Morality without law is as impossible as is thought without mind. Our universe is moral because God created free beings answerable to His law. If there were no law against coveting, there would be no sin of covetousness; if there were no law against red hair, there would be no sin of red headedness—no matter how many red-haired coveters populated the cosmos.

God created humans as creatures who can love. Love, though, can’t exist without freedom, moral freedom. And moral freedom can’t exist without law, moral law. Love rests on freedom, and freedom rests on law. Hence, the core of God’s government, the foundation of that government—a government of love—has to be His law. That’s why Ellen G. White wrote what she did about Satan’s desire “to overthrow the law of God.” The attack on the law is an attack not just on Christ’s character but on the moral order of the creation itself.

Hence, the topic for our quarter: Christ and His law. We will study the law, especially the question of why so many Christians—misunderstanding the relationship between law and grace—have fallen into the trap of denying the continued validity of the Ten Commandments; thus, unwittingly helping the attempt to “overthrow” God’s law.

The Bible, though, is clear: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3, NKJV). The link between our loving God and the keeping of His commandments is stronger than we realize. We can love God because we live in a universe where love can exist, and it can exist because the universe is moral. That morality is based, at least for us as created beings, on God’s moral law—the subject we will now explore.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves” (Romans 2:14, NASB).

In most societies, various laws function at the same time. There can be general laws that apply to everyone and, simultaneously, local laws that prevail in one community but not in another.

In New Testament times, when a person used the common word for “law” (nomos in Greek, lex in Latin, and Torah in Hebrew), he or she could have been referring to any one of a number of laws. Often the only indicator as to the exact law being discussed was the context of the conversation. Thus, as we study this quarter, we’ll always need to keep the immediate context in mind in order to understand best what law is being discussed.

This week’s lesson investigates the various laws that functioned in the community during the time of Christ and the early church. We will study these various laws but only in the context of helping to set a foundation for the study of the law that will be the major focus of this quarter—God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 5.
Roman Law

Read Luke 2:1–5. What lessons can we learn from the ways in which these two faithful followers of the Lord interacted with their political environment?

Since the time of the early republic, the Romans recognized how important written laws were for the governance of society. In fact, the system of constitutional law established by the Romans remains a foundation of the legal systems found in many of today’s democratic societies.

For the most part, Rome allowed vassal kingdoms to maintain their own customs, but all subjects were expected to obey imperial and senatorial laws. Obviously, this included Joseph and Mary.

Roman law was concerned with order in society. As such, it not only addressed issues of government but also legislated behavior in the domestic arena. In addition to stipulating the procedures for selecting people to public office, Roman law also dealt with things such as adultery and master/slave relationships. Many of the social codes are similar to the ones found in the Old Testament and other societies.

All attempts to understand the culture in which the New Testament books were composed must take into account the fact that the Roman Empire formed the political backdrop for the world in which Jesus and the early church lived. Many things taking place in the New Testament, from the death of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul, make much better sense when we understand whatever we can about the environment of their times. Of course, one doesn’t need to be a scholar of Roman history in order to understand that which we need for salvation. However, when it is possible for us to obtain it, historical knowledge can indeed be helpful.

Despite the amazing providences of Mary’s pregnancy and the obvious hand of the Lord in it, these two people still obeyed the law of the land, which required them to leave their home, even when Mary was quite far along in her pregnancy. Would it not have been better simply to have stayed home, considering the extraordinary circumstances? What might their actions say to us about how we should relate to civil law? (Think how easy it would have been for them to have justified not obeying.)
Mosaic Law: Civic

Although the Jews were under Roman rule at the time of Jesus, they were granted authority over those issues that were unique to their customs and religion (see Acts 18:15). The legislative body responsible for administering Jewish law was called the Sanhedrin. Sometimes referred to as the council (John 11:47, Acts 5:27), the Sanhedrin consisted of 71 men selected from among the priests, elders, and rabbis and was presided over by the high priest. It served as a type of Supreme Court that dealt with Jewish customs, traditions, and laws.

Jewish societal law was founded upon the civil codes revealed in the five books of Moses. Because Moses was the author of the first five biblical books, the laws are referred to as the law of Moses. When God originally gave the laws to Moses, He envisioned a state where He would be the head and the people would enforce His legal mandates. By the time of Jesus, the Jews were subject to Roman law. However, the Roman government allowed them to use Mosaic law in order to settle issues relating to their customs. Here is where the work of the Sanhedrin was especially important.

The New Testament provides several examples of the Mosaic law being applied, or alluded to, in civic matters: Jewish men were still expected to pay the half shekel temple tax (Matt. 17:24–27, Exod. 30:13); divorces were still being governed by the stipulations set forth by Moses (Matt. 19:7, Deut. 24:1–4); people still adhered to the law of levirate marriage, in which a widow was to marry her husband’s brother (Matt. 22:24, Deut. 25:5); boys were still circumcised on the eighth day (John 7:23, Lev. 12:3); and adulterers were to be punished by stoning (John 8:5; Deut. 22:23, 24).

Read Matthew 26:59–61, Hebrews 10:28, and Deuteronomy 17:2–6. What important principle is seen here? What does this tell us about biblical concepts of justice and fairness?

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Read some of the civil legislation found in the early books of the Bible. Some of those laws do seem strange to us, don’t they? (See, for example, Deuteronomy 21.) Considering who the Author is of these laws, what should this tell us about how we must learn to trust the Lord in all things, especially those things we don’t fully understand?
Mosaic Law: Ceremonial

Read Leviticus 1:1–9, 2:14–16, 5:11–13. To what are these laws referring? What was their purpose? What important truths were they meant to teach?

Besides the civil laws in ancient Israel, there was also what is often called the “ceremonial law.” This law centered around the sanctuary and its services, all of which, of course, were designed to teach the children of Israel the plan of salvation and point them to the coming Messiah. In the texts for today, twice it is mentioned that through these services “atonement” would be made. In their own way, these laws were what have been deemed “miniprophecies” of Christ and His work of atonement for the sins of His people.

“The ceremonial law was given by Christ. Even after it was no longer to be observed, Paul presented it before the Jews in its true position and value, showing its place in the plan of redemption and its relation to the work of Christ; and the great apostle pronounces this law glorious, worthy of its divine Originator. The solemn service of the sanctuary typified the grand truths that were to be revealed through successive generations. . . . Thus through age after age of darkness and apostasy faith was kept alive in the hearts of men until the time came for the advent of the promised Messiah.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 367.

Though instituted by Jesus, the ceremonial system was meant to function only as a type, a symbol of a future reality—the coming of Jesus and His death and High Priestly ministry. Once He completed His work on earth, this old system—along with its sacrifices and rituals and feasts—no longer was needed (see Heb. 9:9–12). Though we no longer keep the ceremonial law today, by studying it we can garner insights into the plan of salvation.

Central to the sanctuary service was the sacrifice of the animals, which pointed to the death of Jesus. Think what it means that our salvation could come only through His death on our behalf. What should this tell us about just how costly sin is?
Rabbinic Law

In addition to the Mosaic laws, Jews at the time of Jesus were also familiar with the law of the rabbis. The rabbis were the scholastic arm of the Pharisees, and they took the responsibility of ensuring that the Mosaic law remained relevant to the people. The rabbis counted 613 laws in the five books of Moses (including 39 pertaining to the Sabbath), and they used these laws as the basis for their legislation. They supplemented these written laws with an oral law that consisted of the interpretations of leading rabbis.

Oral law is known as halakah, which means “to walk.” The rabbis felt that if the people adhered to their numerous halakoth (plural of halakah), they would walk in the way of the 613 major laws. Although originating as oral law, the rabbinic halakoth were collated and recorded in book form. Some of the interpretations from Jesus’ day survive in commentaries known as Midrash, while others are recorded in a legal collection called Mishnah. Many religious Jews through the ages, and even today, seek to adhere strictly to these laws.

Read Luke 14:1–6 and John 9. Although Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath with His miraculous healings, where can you find in the Old Testament that it’s a sin to heal on the Sabbath day? How does the answer help us to understand some of the issues which Jesus had to address? More important, what lessons can we learn from these incidents that could help us to make sure that we don’t make similar mistakes in our attempts to “walk in the way” faithfully?

Though it’s easy from our perspective today to deride many of these oral laws, especially when they were used as they were against Jesus, the fault exists more with the attitude of the leaders and not with these laws themselves. Though often kept very legalistically, halakoth were meant to be very spiritual, infusing a spiritual element into the most mundane of actions, giving them a religious significance.

How can we learn to give even the most mundane tasks a religious significance?
The Moral Law

However much Roman law, Mosaic law, and rabbinic law impacted the lives of Jews living in first-century Israel, many people who followed the religion of Israel lived outside of Palestine and beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. Thus, many of these laws would not have played a big role in their lives.

At the same time, however, anyone professing to be a follower of the God of Israel would have adhered to the Ten Commandments. “The Ten Commandments provide Israel with the moral framework for maintaining it [their relationship with God]. The metaphor that the Bible uses to express this relationship is covenant. While the metaphor comes from the sphere of international law, it is wrong to understand the commandments merely as a summary of Israel’s obligations toward God. . . . Israel’s obedience to the commandments was not a matter of submission to the divine will as much as it was a response to love.” —Leslie J. Hoppe, “Ten Commandments,” Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1285.

The Ten Commandments surpassed any system of law known to Jews in the first century. Even the Pharisees, who had meticulously memorized the 613 Mosaic laws, recognized the importance of the Ten Commandments. The division of the Mishnah called Tamid (5:1) contains a rabbinic command to recite the Ten Commandments daily. It was believed that all the other laws were contained in the Ten Commandments. In fact, the Jewish philosopher Philo, who was a contemporary of Jesus, wrote an entire book on the central place the Ten Commandments held among all biblical law.

**Read** Matthew 19:16–19, Romans 13:8–10, and James 2:8–12. What do these verses say about the role that the Ten Commandments play in the lives of those who are followers of Christ?

Like their Jewish counterparts, the inspired writers of the New Testament recognized the purpose of the Ten Commandments for God’s people. Although some of the lessons for this quarter will discuss the way in which Christ interacted with other systems of law in His day, the primary emphasis will be on His relationship to the Ten Commandments—what is often known as “the moral law.”

“If Adam had not transgressed the law of God, the ceremonial law would never have been instituted. The gospel of good news was first given to Adam in the declaration made to him that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head; and it was handed down through successive generations to Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The knowledge of God’s law, and the plan of salvation were imparted to Adam and Eve by Christ Himself. They carefully treasured the important lesson, and transmitted it by word of mouth, to their children, and children’s children. Thus the knowledge of God’s law was preserved.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 230.

Discussion Questions:

1. Long before Moses penned the laws that were to govern Israel, the Egyptians and Babylonians had systems of societal laws that were, in some cases, similar in content to some of God’s laws. Even atheistic societies have laws that protect people and property. Law, though, is often based on moral concepts; that is, law should encourage people to refrain from certain types of evil and to do certain types of good. From where, though, do societies get their sense of good and evil?

2. How does the whole concept of good and evil impact the question of God’s existence? In other words, if there is no God, from where do the concepts of good and evil come? From where is the only place that they could come if no God existed?

3. We often use the concept of “law” in different ways. We talk about the law of gravity, the law of motion. We talk about international law. We talk about the law of the land. We talk about tax law. What do all of these laws have in common? In what ways do they differ? What is the probable consequence of violating any of these laws? What are the benefits of cooperating with these laws? How do the principles of law help you to understand the purpose of the Ten Commandments as it relates to the life of believers?

4. In class, go back to Wednesday’s lesson and deal with the issue of how we as a church need to be careful that we don’t make the same mistake that some of the leaders did by adding burdens to the law that were never meant to be there. Why is such a mistake easier to make than we might think, no matter how well-meaning we might be?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 13:8–10

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the different types of laws referenced in Scripture.

**Feel:** Appreciate God’s law as an expression of His eternal love and character.

**Do:** Respond in love to God by keeping His law.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Understand the All-Pervasive Character of Law**
   - A How do the various law systems contribute to our understanding of God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments?
   - B What is the relationship between law and a particular culture?
   - C How do the Ten Commandments surpass any system of law known to humanity?

II. **Feel: A Love for God’s Law**
   - A How can I feel positive about God’s law?
   - B How can I effectively communicate appreciation for God’s law to my children?
   - C Are motivation and feeling the same thing? Why, or why not? Do I have to feel like keeping God’s law, or are there times when keeping God’s law will go against my feelings? Explain.

III. **Do: A Love Response**
   - A What is the link between God’s love and His law in practical terms?
   - B How should I, as a Christian, respond to the local civil laws of my country?
   - C Seeing that God values my motivation, how can I inject a love response into everyday mundane tasks and obligations?

**Summary:** Various laws governed society in the time of Christ. An understanding of the historical and cultural context provides a framework for God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Psalm 19:8

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Ten Commandments are not just a list of obligations. Rather, they provide the moral framework for maintaining a covenant relationship with God in response to His love.

Just for Teachers: A lot of people, both in and outside of the church, have relatively negative associations toward God’s law. Some find the letter of the law—particularly the fourth and the tenth commandments—to be irrelevant, ancient relics. Others fear the law, believing that their salvation depends on strict adherence to the Ten Commandments. This week’s lesson looks at various laws in operation at the time of Christ in order to help us set a foundation for a more positive approach to God’s law.

We all need laws in order to enjoy a high quality of life. While some laws, such as those that uphold segregation or slavery, are morally wrong, our man-made laws generally provide security and protection and enable us to lead productive lives. All good civic laws are based on moral concepts and can be traced back to the God of love, the Lawgiver who wants the best for us.

Opening Activity: Ask the class to reflect on the possible results of doing away with all traffic laws (or perhaps property laws). Explore the effects this would have on the quality of life that members would experience. Be sure to highlight the protective quality of laws for everyday life.

Discuss: Why are so many civic laws concerned with the relationships between people? Why are laws needed in relationships?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Since the time of the Reformation, the key theological concepts of law and grace have often been set in opposition. To highlight the important message of righteousness by faith, the Reformers (and their heirs) often thought of law in a negative way and emphasized the futility of trying to attain righteousness by accumulating “brownie points” that had to be measured by their compliance with the law. Law and grace were considered to be worlds apart, representing two extremes of a continuum.
Yet, a careful look at the larger biblical picture regarding law and grace reminds us that both terms describe two sides of the same coin and should not be set in opposition. Over the past decades, biblical theologians have recognized that law in both testaments is an expression of God’s will and character that requires careful (and joyful) study and obedient application. In the commentary that follows, we will focus upon several key characteristics of biblical law.

I. Biblical Law Is Wide-Ranging (Review Psalm 119 with your class.)

But before we discuss these characteristics, it would be good to remember that “law” in Scripture is not always easily dissected and defined—something that those who are trained in Western logic and reasoning are, nonetheless, prone to attempt. We want to know what kind of law we are talking about and have found labels, such as moral, civil, or ceremonial, to describe law in a particular context. While these divisions may be helpful in some circumstances, they tend to be rather artificial. For one thing, there are numerous Hebrew terms that appear to be interchangeable and that can be translated as “law,” “statute,” “commandment,” “precept,” or any other variation on the theme. Psalm 119, one of the most enthusiastic Old Testament texts focusing upon the law, contains at least eight different Hebrew terms that denote “law” or one of its synonyms. These terms are used interchangeably and in varying combinations throughout the 22 stanzas of this magnificent poem. Writes Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham: “‘Law’ or ‘instruction’ covers all God’s revelation to Israel, whether it is found in the Pentateuch or other parts of the Bible.”—Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012), p. 97. It is so closely linked to God, the Lawgiver, that the psalmist writes about it in Psalm 119:10: “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments” (NASB).

Consider This: If straying from God’s commandments means wandering away from God Himself, what can we do to encourage a positive focus upon God’s law?

II. God’s Law Is Good and a Gift to His Creation (Review Psalm 19:7, 8 with your class.)

As creation was “good” (or “very good”; compare with Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), so is God’s law characterized by its goodness and perfection. Psalm 119:39 says, “Your ordinances are good” (NASB), echoing a similar concept found in Psalm 19:7: “The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple”
In the Old Testament, goodness and perfection are closely associated with God. Lawgiver and law reflect the same basic characteristics. In this context, it does not matter what kind of law is considered. Since this law (as part of God’s eternal expression of His will or spoken into a specific historical context) emanates from God, it is good and a gift to His creation (Neh. 9:13). A similar notion is expressed by Paul in Romans 7:12.

Consider This: How can Scripture equate “good gifts” with law?

III. God’s Law Defines God’s Covenant Community (Review Romans 9:31 and 10:4 with your class.)

God’s expression of His covenant establishes a people (or, in New Testament terms, a body of believers). These people are characterized by obedience to God’s good law. Through the covenant—with its blessings and potential curses—they are adopted into God’s family. However, disregard of the covenant conditions results in divine punishment, as the history of Israel amply illustrates. In the New Testament, Paul uses the unique expression the “law of righteousness” in Romans 9:31 (NASB). This law does not achieve righteousness but bears witness to the righteousness that is intricately linked to God as Lawgiver and Savior. It provides a taste to those who have sampled it—not bitter or poisonous but sweet and promising a more complete solution.

Consider This: In light of the above, how should we understand the law in Romans 10:4? In your answer, consider the role of a Roman tutor who leads his student.

IV. Law and Life (Review Leviticus 18:5 and John 10:10 with your class.)

Living a life that is faithful to the divine law (torah) means living life to its fullest. Leviticus 18:5 expresses this notion: “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord” (NASB). This text (and others, such as Ezekiel 18:5–9; Psalm 119:93; and Deuteronomy 30:15, 16) highlights the close link between law and life. Yes, obedience meant life in the Promised Land for Israel, but obedience is closely linked to the Lord Himself and should be connected to Jesus’ programmatic statement in John 10:10: “‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’” (NASB). Obedience, as well as a close relationship to the Lawgiver, is essential for a true authentic life. Obedience does not pay for eternal life but is the experience of those who are already sampling this abundant life in a kingdom that is both here and, yet, still to come.

Consider This: Why are Christians often tempted to try to earn their salvation through keeping the law rather than letting law-keeping be the result
of a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ, the One who came to give us “abundant life”?

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. When God originally gave the laws to Moses, He envisioned a state wherein He would be the Head of the government. In what ways are God’s laws and secular states compatible? Explain.
2. Fifty years ago, some behaviors, such as the practice of homosexuality, were seen by societies, at large, as being wrong. Now there seems to be a shift in many societies in which such lifestyle choices are no longer viewed that way. Where does society get a sense of what is moral and amoral?
3. Why do we say that the Ten Commandments are still relevant while we view other laws in the first five books of the Bible as no longer relevant; for example, circumcision on the eighth day? (Hint: Look at the big picture of the relationship between God as the Lawgiver and the law as the expression of His character.)
4. Revelation 12:17 puts obedience to God’s commandments within the context of the final conflict between good and evil. Does keeping the commandments really save this final remnant, or is this just an outward sign of something bigger? Explain your answer.

Application Questions:

1. How should we as Christians react to civil laws that we find irritating or pointless?
2. The rabbis in Jesus’ day tried to ensure that God’s law remained relevant by adding lots of rules. How do we as Seventh-day Adventists show the world how relevant God’s law is without making our own lists of rules—for example, what you can and can’t do on Sabbath? Are all such rules bad?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: What would be the effects on human relationships and our relationship with God if even one of the Ten Commandments were done away with? Imagine, hypothetically, that a specific commandment were indeed abrogated. What would be the consequences of doing away with that one in particular? What does this activity teach us about the necessity of God’s law in preserving and protecting our happiness and our relationships to others?
Many Christians have been raised on stories about Jesus’ supposedly negative relationship to the Jewish religion, an unfortunate misconception that has only helped feed anti-Semitism through the centuries. Jesus spoke out against abuses of the religion, that’s true, but not against the religion itself. After all, He was the founder of it.

Indeed, the Gospel accounts of His life and ministry show that Jesus was a faithful Jew fully immersed in Jewish culture from the moment of His birth to the final week of His life in human flesh.

Like every loyal Jew in the first century, Jesus was subject to the Mosaic law. Raised in a home with loyal Jewish parents, He fully appreciated His rich earthly heritage, which was rooted in Divine providence. He knew that God Himself had inspired Moses to pen these laws, with the purpose of creating a society that reflected His will and served as a beacon to the nations. He adhered faithfully to the letter of the law. From circumcision to His visit to the temple to the feasts and to His attitude about taxes, Jesus remained steadfastly faithful to a system that, He knew, would over time be fulfilled through His death and His ministry in heaven.

This week we’ll look at more of the laws that Jesus Himself kept.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 12.
Circumcision and Dedication *(Luke 2:21–24)*

God established His covenant with Abraham, saying that he would be the father of many nations *(Gen. 17:4)*. When God made this covenant, the 99-year-old Abraham had only recently fathered Ishmael and had not yet seen the birth of his promised son, Isaac. Nonetheless, he was commanded to circumcise himself along with every male member of his household, and he was instructed to ensure that every son born into his household from that day forth be circumcised on the eighth day *(Gen. 17:9–12)*. So important was this sign that the circumcision took place even if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath *(Lev. 12:3, John 7:22)*.

This truth gives us a better understanding of the earliest days of Jesus’ life. The Gospels do show that Joseph and Mary were chosen to be the earthly parents of Jesus at least in part because of their piety. Joseph is described as a “righteous man” *(Matt. 1:19, NASB)*, and Mary is said to have “found favor with God” *(Luke 1:30, NASB)*. When Jesus was eight days old, His parents held a naming and circumcision ceremony in the same manner as an untold number of Hebrew males had experienced in times past.

Imagine, the spotless Son of God, now in human form, undergoing the very ritual that He Himself had instituted many centuries earlier!

**Read** Luke 2:21–24 in light of Exodus 13:2, 12 and Leviticus 12:1–8. What more do these texts tell us about Joseph and Mary? What can we learn for ourselves, in our own time and sphere, from their example?

The Bible is clear that Mary was a virgin when she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus *(Luke 1:27)*; so, Jesus was the first child that “opened her womb.” According to Exodus 13, every firstborn among the Israelites (whether animal or human) was to be dedicated to the Lord. The law also stipulated in Leviticus 12:2–5 that after the birth of a male child, the woman was ceremonially unclean for a total of 40 days (80 for a female child). At the end of this period, she was required to show herself to the priest and offer a sacrifice. As pious Jews, Mary and Joseph meticulously fulfilled the obligations of the Mosaic law and ensured that the Son of God bore the marks of the covenant.
Jewish Feasts *(John 5:1)*

“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem” *(John 5:1, NKJV).*

The first major festival period in the Jewish calendar year is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which commences with Passover. The festival commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, when the angel of death *passed over* the homes of those who put the blood on their doorposts. The Gospels record three occasions when Jesus celebrated Passover *(Luke 2:41–43, John 2:13–23, Matt. 26:17–20).*

Fifty days after Passover came the feast of Shavuot, often referred to by its Greek name, Pentecost. Although the Scriptures don’t provide a reason for Pentecost, the rabbis believed that it commemorated the giving of the law to Moses. There is no record in the Gospels that Jesus celebrated Pentecost. However, before His ascension He counseled His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit *(Acts 1:4, 5).* This event actually occurred on the Day of Pentecost *(Acts 2:1–4).*

The final festival season in the Jewish calendar were the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The Day of Atonement signifies the day on which sin was cleansed from the camp and the people were at one with God. The Feast of Booths commemorates the time when Israel had to live in tents in the wilderness.

In addition to the feasts of Moses’ laws, the Jews have two other festivals that commemorate God’s historical intervention. The first is Purim, which marks the deliverance of the Jewish people from genocide, when Esther appealed to the Persian king. The second is Hanukah, also known as the Feast of Dedication *(John 10:22)*, which celebrates the victory of the Maccabeans over the Greeks in 164 B.C.

Of course, the biblical feasts were done away with long ago, at least as far as Christians are concerned. They all met their fulfillment in Christ. However, we can learn a great deal through studying them and the messages that they contain, because all of them teach lessons about God’s saving grace and power to deliver.

*Though we no longer keep the feasts, what things can we do that help to keep before us the reality of God, what He has done for us, and what He asks of us?*
Jesus in the Temple

The New Testament does not tell us too much about the childhood of Jesus. One account, though, that gives great insight is Luke 2:41–52, the story of Jesus and His parents’ visit to Jerusalem during the Feast of Passover. Read it over and then answer the following questions:

**How** does this story help to illustrate the decidedly Jewish character of the Gospels and how central the religion was to all that took place?

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**How** is it significant that this story took place during the Passover?

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**For** how many days were Jesus’ parents not able to find Him? Of what does that remind you?

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**Though** Jesus was an obedient child, His answer to His parents appears to be almost a rebuke. What important point does His reply contain? What does this say to all of us about what must have top priority in our lives?

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Read Luke 2:51. What does it mean that He was “subject” to them? How does this verse give us even more insight into the amazing condescension on the part of God for our salvation? What can this teach us about the need for submission in the right time and place?

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Taxes *(Matt. 17:24–27)*

As last week’s lesson noted, the law of Moses had both civic and ceremonial components. The ceremonial aspect means that the temple was at the center of Jewish religious life. In fact, by the first century, the temple was probably the only remaining structure that gave the Jews any sense of national identity.

The temple that stood in Jerusalem was undergoing renovations during Jesus’ ministry. Herod the Great had started the grandiose project in about 20 B.C., and it would not be fully completed until A.D. 66. Recognizing how serious many Jews were about their faith, the Romans allowed the Jews to collect their own taxes in order to cover the costs involved with the maintenance of the temple. Every Jewish male over the age of 20 was to pay the half-shekel tax regardless of his economic status *(Exod. 30:13, 38:26)*.

**Read** Matthew 17:24–27. What did Jesus mean when He said: “Lest we should offend them”? What principle do we find here that we should apply in our own lives, as well?

It seems that the temple tax collectors traveled throughout the provinces to ensure that every male fulfilled his legal obligation. Peter’s initial response to the tax collectors gives the impression that Jesus regularly paid His taxes *(Matt. 17:24, 25)*. However, as the Son of God, Jesus appears to question the appropriateness of having to pay taxes for the upkeep of His Father’s house.

“If Jesus had paid the tribute without a protest, He would virtually have acknowledged the justice of the claim [that He was under obligation to pay], and would thus have denied His divinity. But while He saw good to meet the demand, He denied the claim upon which it was based. In providing for the payment of the tribute He gave evidence of His divine character. It was made manifest that He was one with God, and therefore was not under tribute as a mere subject of the kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 434.

Notwithstanding, Jesus chose to comply with the authorities and directed Peter to retrieve the tax from the mouth of the first fish that he caught. The shekel in the fish’s mouth was enough to cover the tax for both Jesus and Peter.

**Jesus paid His temple tax even though He knew that the magnificent structure would soon be destroyed *(Matt. 24:1, 2)*. What should this tell us about our obligations to be faithful in our tithes and offerings, regardless of whatever problems we believe exist?**
Law Enforcement (Matt. 5:17–20)

As we have seen, Jesus was a faithful citizen who fulfilled His responsibilities as a Jewish male, even when His life was in danger (see, for example, John 7:1, 25, 26; 10:31). In fact, Jesus makes it clear that it was not His purpose to abolish “‘the Law or the Prophets’” (Matt. 5:17–20, NKJV).

How, then, are we to understand John 8:1–11 and Matthew 19:1–9 in light of Deuteronomy 22:23, 24 and 24:1–4? What is happening here?

Some of the Pharisees were always trying to expose Jesus as a law-breaker (see, for example, John 8:6). When they present Him with the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, they pose this question: Moses says she should be stoned; what do You say? Interestingly enough, Jesus does not directly respond to their inquiry. In fact, He affirms the law of Moses with His response, “‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first’” (John 8:7, NKJV). He isn’t saying that she shouldn’t be stoned; He simply forces these men to see their own violations of the law. Even the woman’s release is in harmony with the law of Moses, because there is none to point an accusing finger, and at least two witnesses are needed to administer justice (Deut. 17:6).

In the incident concerning divorce and remarriage, Jesus appears to contradict the law of Moses with His insistence that there were originally no grounds for divorce (Matt. 19:4–6). When the Pharisees point to Moses’ commandment in Deuteronomy 24:1–4, Jesus places everything in perspective. Nowhere does Moses command that divorce should take place. However, because of the people’s obstinacy, Moses made an allowance for divorce (Matt. 19:8). Thus, we see that even when Jesus critiques a Mosaic law, He does not set it aside. Jesus was a faithful Jew in every way, adhering to the laws of Moses.

How do we learn to balance justice and grace for those who, like ourselves, fall into sin? If we are going to err, as we as fallen beings inevitably do, what side is it better to err on, and why?

“Three times a year the Jews were required to assemble at Jerusalem for religious purposes. Enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, Israel’s invisible Leader had given the directions in regard to these gatherings. During the captivity of the Jews, they could not be observed; but when the people were restored to their own land, the observance of these memorials was once more begun. It was God’s design that these anniversaries should call Him to the minds of the people.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 447.

“It was natural for the parents of Jesus to look upon Him as their own child. He was daily with them, His life in many respects was like that of other children, and it was difficult for them to realize that He was the Son of God. They were in danger of failing to appreciate the blessing granted them in the presence of the world’s Redeemer. The grief of their separation from Him, and the gentle reproof which His words conveyed, were designed to impress them with the sacredness of their trust.”—Page 81.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell on the incredible truth that though Jesus instituted these laws, when He enters into humanity He places Himself under them. What does this tell us about the character of God?

2. Try to put yourself in the position of Joseph and Mary. Is it any wonder that they didn’t fully understand all that was involved with Jesus? Are there not a lot of things about Jesus that we don’t understand either? How can we learn to trust and obey, despite the many things that we don’t understand?

3. What would you say to a Christian who argues that we are to keep the feasts? (Hint: You might start by asking, “How do you intend to keep them, given that the feasts all centered around the temple, which has long been destroyed, and the shedding of blood, which has stopped?”)
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 5:46

The Student Will:

Know: Realize that Jesus gave the law of Moses on Mount Sinai.
Feel: Perceive the law as a positive gift of God.
Do: Follow Jesus’ example of dynamically living within God’s laws.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Jesus Was the Founder of the Laws of the Old Testament
   A How did Jesus demonstrate His adherence to the law?
   B What relationship did Jesus have with the law of Moses?
   C How do the laws of Judaism contribute to our understanding of God’s saving grace and power to deliver His people then and now?

II. Feel: A Love for God’s Law
   A How did Jesus feel about the law?
   B Why is it important to see God’s law as a positive sign of His covenant with us?
   C Scan through Psalm 119. Pick out the verbs that David—the man after God’s own heart—uses to describe how he feels about God’s law. How do these verbs help us to perceive the law as a positive gift from God?

III. Do: Live the Law of Life
   A How do you feel about God’s law? If you don’t exactly love it, what can you do to change your attitude?
   B How can you relate to the law as Jesus did?
   C Which of your behavioral patterns may be giving your family or friends a negative impression of God’s law?

Summary: Jesus as the Lawgiver was also subject to the law as a Jewish man. Although Jesus was critical of the man-made regulations that killed the spirit of the law, He respected the law and underlined in His ministry the lessons about God’s saving grace and power revealed in the law.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** John 5:46

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** As Christ’s followers, we should relate to the law as He did, understanding its beauty and power and its reflection of God’s character.

All too often the law—and the Lawgiver, for that matter—seems to receive bad press. Many people see the Jesus of the New Testament as kind and forgiving, while viewing the God of the Old Testament as a stern heavenly policeman with a list of laws that He tries vigorously to enforce. We forget that the entire Godhead—the Trinity—authored the whole system of law in the Old Testament. Jesus modeled a life based on the law. And it was only by the Holy Spirit’s power that the first Christians could follow Jesus’ example in applying God’s law to their everyday lives.

Ellen G. White emphasizes the central place of God’s law by saying, “It is the sophistry of Satan that the death of Christ brought in grace to take the place of the law. The death of Jesus did not change or annul or lessen in the slightest degree the law of Ten Commandments. That precious grace offered to men through a Saviour’s blood establishes the law of God. Since the fall of man, God’s moral government and His grace are inseparable. They go hand in hand through all dispensations. ‘Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other’ (Ps. 85:10).” —*Faith and Works*, p. 30.

**Opening Activity:** Ask the class to reflect on why stars in the entertainment industry have a ready crowd of followers who dress and behave as their idols, even down to emulating their lifestyles, while Christians seem, all too often, to be resistant to following Christ’s lifestyle of law-keeping. Try to uncover the motivation in both cases.

**Discuss:** An exasperated police officer once said, “If we are ever going to have a genuine improvement in the crime situation, we’ve got to tackle the root cause of crime—we need to get rid of laws.” What effect on crime would implementing this solution have? By extension, what kind of impact might such a solution have in the religious sphere were it applied in relation to the problem of sin?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Power of Ritual *(Review briefly the sacrificial legislation in Leviticus 4 and 16 with your class.)*
Many Protestant Christians (including some Seventh-day Adventists) have a strained relationship to ritual. Yet, ritual is part and parcel of our daily life, even though we often may not be fully aware of its presence. Ritual transforms, orders, initiates, focuses, communicates, and fulfills many other functions in religious (and daily) life. Consider the importance of political rituals (for example, the swearing in of a new president) or rituals that mark important life transitions (such as coming of age, marriage, or death). The public nature of most of the rituals helps us to understand complex realities. Just imagine some of the sacrificial rituals (for example, the sin offering described in Leviticus 4) in Old Testament times and how they communicated to those living in Israel (or even the surrounding nations). The death of an innocent and pricey animal clearly taught the costliness of sin. The transfer of the individual’s sin via laying hands on the head of the animal was symbolic. Somebody else had to pay the price. Blood had to be collected and smeared upon the altar, and then it needed to be brought into the sanctuary and sprinkled upon the veil separating the Holy from the Holy of Holies. The animal had to be burned and, once a year, the sanctuary, contaminated with the “sprinkled sin” of many, had to be “cleansed,” which happened during the Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16).

**Consider This:** What would you feel and think if you could participate in a Day of Atonement ritual today? What would it do to your understanding of sin, grace, and God’s plan of salvation? Read Leviticus 16 carefully and act out the main action. Consider the meaning of the ritual and its application to the death and ministry of Jesus Christ.

**II. Prophetic Critique of Ritual** *(Review 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, and Amos 5:21–27 with your class.)*

However instructive it may be, ritual can also become a stumbling block, especially when it becomes rote repetition. Many biblical prophets criticized this mind-set of ritualized worship devoid of substance. Take, for example, 1 Samuel 15:22: “‘Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams’” *(NASB).* Samuel strongly reprimands King Saul, who has decided that obeying the divine instructions is negotiable. He has spared the pagan king as well as the best animals and all that is precious *(vs. 9).* The biblical text reminds us powerfully that ritual can never be sacramental but that it needs to be accompanied by the appropriate attitude and mind-set.

Two centuries later, Hosea follows suit: “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings”
(Hos. 6:6, NASB). Hosea’s critique of sacrificial ritual focuses upon attitudes and actions. The prophet uses two important Hebrew terms denoting covenant loyalty (hesed) and relational knowledge (da’at). Israel is busy sacrificing but has forgotten to connect sacrifice to real life: the way they treat the widow, the orphan, or the poor; the things they worship; the importance of things in relation to God. Somehow they do not show covenant mercy to one another but rather focus upon an outward show of piety.

Similar concepts are expressed in Amos 5:21–27 and Isaiah 1:15–18. Israel’s prophets remind God’s covenant people that ritual action does not replace the right attitude toward God and one’s neighbor. The prophets do not criticize the divinely inspired laws and rituals, per se, but rather their thoughtless application.

**Consider This:** Considering the fact that God instituted, in minute detail, the sacrificial system, why would He inspire prophets to critique it?

### III. Jesus, Ritual, and First-Century Judaism

(Redview the institution of the Last Supper in John 13 with your class.)

Ritual played a significant role during the time of Jesus. The temple represented the center of Jewish theology and practice. When we consider the texts found near the settlement of Khirbet Qumran that date roughly to the century prior to the arrival of Jesus, we suddenly understand the all-pervasiveness of ritual in the life of Jews living in that era. Purification, ritual washings, blessings—they all were expressed by ritual action. Biblical scholar Robert Kugler writes, “From the way they [the inhabitants of Qumran] measured their time to the way they consumed their meals, from their rising in the morning to their laying down at night, from the way they prayed to the way they saw to the purity of their bodies, from their entry into the community to their departure from it, the people of Qumran patterned their actions in ‘more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances’ aimed at bringing them closer to God.”—“Making All Experience Religious: The Hegemony of Ritual at Qumran,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 33, no. 2 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2002), pp. 131–152.

Jesus was born and raised in this context. He was circumcised at the right time (*Luke* 2:21). His parents paid the ransom price for their first-born (vs. 22). He visited the temple and participated in the Passover ritual. Yet, paradoxically, at times Jesus consciously sets Himself in opposition to Jewish ritual practice (*Matt. 15:1, 2*). When it is time to celebrate the last Passover prior to His death, Jesus transforms an existing ritual (Passover) and institutes a new ritual that reminds His disciples of His death and resurrection (*John 13, Matt. 26:17–30*). Christians all over the world still celebrate the Communion supper. Seventh-day Adventists, in particular,
also reenact during each commemoration of the Lord’s Supper the service of humility by washing one another’s feet as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. By its institution, Jesus made an important statement and underlined the important communicative power of ritual: ritual not only pointed to the Messiah but was also a preferred tool of communicating the new way of the kingdom. (Baptism is another example of a ritual that actually tells a story and communicates key concepts of the Christian life.)

**Consider This:** How could we celebrate the Lord’s Supper more meaningfully? What elements would help us to “remember” and then “do”?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What can the ceremonial laws tell us about God and His character?
2. Think of all the ritual connections between Jesus’ death and Israel’s sacrificial system. Take particular note of the time and the place of Jesus’ death.
3. What difference will the realization that Jesus is also the Author of the law make in your attitude toward the law?

**Application Questions:**

1. Jesus not only lived His life by God’s laws, He also lived His life by God’s timetable for Him *(see John 7:8).* How can I live God’s laws and timetables in my daily life?
2. How should I treat those who are living lifestyles contrary to God’s law? Would I treat them differently if they were part of the church family?
3. Jesus lived as a Jew and adhered to all the positive parts of His culture while shunning the negative aspects. What are some of the positive parts of our culture that can be celebrated, and what are some of the negative aspects that should be shunned?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** As a class, imagine how Jesus would relate to some aspects of our culture if He lived here and now. Where do you think Jesus would eat out? How would He feel about sports or politics? Would He have a Facebook account or spend time watching movies? Be sure to back up your answers with examples from Jesus’ life, showing the principles by which He lived that would inform His lifestyle choices.
Christ and Religious Tradition

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 23:1–7, Matt. 15:1–6, Isa. 29:13, Matt. 5:17–20, Rom. 10:3.

Memory Text: “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the percepts of men’” (Matthew 15:8, 9, RSV).

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, suggested that one’s theology is influenced by four factors: faith, reason, Scripture, and tradition. He didn’t mean, however, that all sides are equally authoritative. He acknowledged that the Bible was foundational, but he also recognized that one’s individual faith, ability to reason, and religious tradition affect the way in which the Bible is interpreted. If Wesley were brought back to life today, he would be shocked to discover that many modern theologians in the Wesleyan tradition (and other traditions, as well) now value reason, tradition, or personal opinion over the clear teaching of Scripture.

This week’s lesson investigates the religious traditions upon which the scribes and Pharisees based many of their teachings. The rabbis who originally penned these traditions greatly respected the Scriptures and had no intention for these traditions to be elevated to the status of God’s Word. However, some of their zealous disciples confused the method with the message and in doing so shifted the focus from God’s written revelation to human tradition.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.
Seat of Moses

While the “scribes and Pharisees” appear to be two separate groups who just happened to be lumped together, the scribes were likely a subset of the Pharisees (see Acts 23:9). The Pharisees became a visible group during the time of the Grecian Empire. They are believed to be the remnants of a pious Jewish sect, known as the Hasidim, who helped to fight in the Maccabean revolution against Greece.

The name Pharisees is derived from the Hebrew paras, which means “to separate.” In an age when many Jews had become greatly influenced by pagan cultures, the Pharisees saw it as their duty to ensure that every Jewish male was taught the law. To accomplish this task, they established the position of rabbi, which literally means “my great one” or “my teacher.”

In saying that the “‘scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,’” Jesus acknowledged their positions as teachers of the people (Matt. 23:2, 3, NKJV). After all, at least they had taken the responsibility to ensure that the people were instructed in the way of the law.

Read Matthew 23:1–7. From these verses, what was one of Jesus’ biggest problems with the scribes and Pharisees?

Most of the references to the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospels are negative, and considering the complicity that many (but not all) had in the death of Jesus and the persecution of His followers, that negativity was well deserved. Members of these groups seemed to be lurking around corners and hiding behind trees just waiting for people to make mistakes so they could enforce the law against them. This image of the Pharisee is so frequent in Scripture that the word is often used as a synonym for legalist. As we look closely at this text, we find that Jesus’ big problem with the Pharisees was not so much that they wanted others to keep the law of Moses but that they themselves were not keeping it. They were hypocritical—they said one thing, but did another—and even when they did the right thing, they did it for wrong reasons.

Read again what Jesus said about the scribes and Pharisees. How can we make sure that we don’t become guilty of similar attitudes?
Human Commandments

Although the scribes and Pharisees “sat in Moses’ seat,” their source of authority for religious instruction extended beyond the Old Testament. The law that the Pharisees utilized consisted of biblical interpretations of leading rabbis. These interpretations were not intended to replace the Scriptures but to complement them. At first they circulated orally; later the scribes began to assemble them into books.

The first official publication of rabbinic law did not appear until the end of the second century A.D., when Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi (Judah the Prince) published the Mishnah. The laws recorded in the Mishnah reflect about four centuries of rabbinic interpretation. Included among the contributing rabbis are many who lived at the time of Jesus, the most notable being Hillel and Shammai. There was also Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel and also Paul’s teacher.

Read Matthew 15:1–6. What is the controversial issue here? What error is Jesus seeking to correct?

In lesson 1, we learned that the rabbinic laws were called halakah, which means “to walk.” The rabbis felt that if a person would walk in the ways of the minor laws, they would keep the major ones by default. However, somewhere along the way the minor laws began to take on major status, and after a while it was difficult to distinguish the traditional from the biblical.

It does not appear that Jesus had a problem with the Pharisees having their own rules. However, He did have a problem with the elevation of these rules to the status of “doctrine.” No human has the authority to create religious restrictions and elevate them to the level of divine mandate. But this is not to say that groups of believers are prohibited from creating regulations that help to govern community behavior. Practical instruction could help people greatly in keeping the law. However, the instruction should never be allowed to take the place of the law itself.

As Seventh-day Adventists, what rules, traditions, and customs do we have that we believe help us to live more faithfully and obediently to the law? Write them down and bring them to class on Sabbath, asking questions about the role that they play in the life of your faith community.
Traditions of the Elders

As we saw, some of the rabbis paid so much attention to the rules and traditions created to assist in the keeping of the law of Moses that they failed to distinguish between the two. After a while, the words of the rabbis gained canonical status; people thought they were as binding as Scripture. In all probability, when the rabbis originally wrote their commentaries, they had no intention of adding to the pages of Scripture. However, their devoted disciples probably saw it as their duty to share these unique interpretations with the general populace.

Read again Matthew 15:1, 2. The tradition is based on what text in the first five books of Moses? What is the significance of your answer? See also Mark 7:3, 4 and Matt. 15:11.

One is hard pressed to find a biblical text that commands, “Thou shalt wash thy hands before thou eatest.” However, this injunction would not have surprised the scribes and Pharisees as they confronted Jesus, for they made it clear that the disciples were not in violation of Mosaic law but the “tradition of the elders.” The intensity with which they asked the question makes it seem that, for the Pharisees, this was a serious religious violation.

Health professionals and parents would probably like to provide a hygienic or psychological rationale for the Pharisees’ apparent obsessive compulsion with hand washing. However, scholars believe that the issue was really about ceremonial uncleanliness. Apparently, the Pharisees were concerned that as people went about their daily business they would touch items that had been defiled. Consequently, if they ate without washing, they would contaminate themselves ceremonially by touching the food.

Given the fact that they levied their charge against Jesus’ disciples, we might conclude that Jesus Himself was not in violation of the well-known tradition (Mark 7:3). Nonetheless, He was well aware that the Pharisees were majoring in minors.

Read Isaiah 29:13. What crucial biblical principles are revealed here? Why are they so important for us to remember?
The Precepts of Men

“The substitution of the precepts of men for the commandments of God has not ceased. Even among Christians are found institutions and usages that have no better foundation than the traditions of the fathers. Such institutions, resting upon mere human authority, have supplanted those of divine appointment. Men cling to their traditions, and revere their customs, and cherish hatred against those who seek to show them their error . . . In place of the authority of the so-called fathers of the church, God bids us accept the word of the eternal Father, the Lord of heaven and earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 398.

**Read** Matthew 15:3–6 but in the context of Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16, Matthew 19:19, and Ephesians 6:2. What two serious charges does Jesus make against the Pharisees?

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When the Pharisees confronted Jesus about the hand-washing incident, they expected Him to respond directly to their charge. However, in His unique style, Jesus confronted them with a question that got to the real heart of the issue. Jesus wanted them to know that the problem was not about hand washing or tithe paying but about the elevation of human standards over divine standards. The Pharisees could provide a logical explanation for their stance on hand washing. Undoubtedly, they probably also reasoned that their channeling of resources to the cause of God rather than to their parents was an expression of their unparalleled love for God.

Although the Pharisees may have had logical motives for their actions, God does not expect humans to love Him on their own terms. It was good that they were concerned about discipline and holy living, but that concern should never eclipse the will of God. The Pharisees should have recalled that the 613 laws recorded in the law of Moses were harmonious and not contradictory. None of the laws sought to supplant another. However, their insistence in following the “tradition of the elders” invalidated the Word of God (*Matt. 15:6*), at least as far as they themselves were concerned. No doubt, seeing themselves as the protectors of the law, they must have been shocked, even scandalized, by the claim that they were actually violating it, even making it of “none effect” by the very traditions that they thought were helping people to keep the law better!
Read Matthew 5:17–20. In the context of this week’s lesson, what are some of the ways that Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 5:20 could be understood? See also Rom. 10:3.

If read in isolation, Matthew 5:20 could be seen as an invitation to out-Pharisee the Pharisees; that is, do what they do, only do it more.

But is this what Jesus is saying? Fortunately, the answer to that question is within our reach. Yesterday’s lesson pointed out that it was not unusual for the scribes and Pharisees to elevate traditional laws over the law of God. Jesus had to tell them that their actions in effect invalidated the plain Word of God. Sunday’s study also mentioned that, although the scribes and Pharisees probably had good content in their teaching, many of them lived hypocritical lives.

Given this background, it is not hard to see the true sentiment behind Jesus’ statement. He very well could have been referring to that which He had elsewhere warned about: “‘Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 5:19, NIV). The Pharisees were so focused on the laws of human origin that they blatantly broke the law of God. Their righteousness was based on their own efforts and, as such, was defective. Isaiah had long declared that human righteousness is nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

The kind of righteousness that Jesus promotes is one that starts in the heart. In the hand-washing incident, Jesus pointed to the Pharisees’ error by quoting from Isaiah 29:13: “‘These people . . . honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me’” (NIV). The righteousness that God seeks goes deeper than visible action.

Jesus calls for a righteousness that exceeds what the Pharisees themselves thought that they possessed. The righteousness that counts is not obtained by checking off every item on a task list; it can be gained only by faith in Jesus Christ and by claiming His righteousness for ourselves. It is a righteousness that comes from a complete surrender of self and a passionate realization that we need Jesus as our Substitute and Example.

Read Romans 10:3. How does this text help us to see what true righteousness is all about?

“Let all who accept human authority, the customs of the church, or the traditions of the fathers, take heed to the warning conveyed in the words of Christ, ‘In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 398.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the traditions that we as Seventh-day Adventists follow? Why is it important to recognize them as such? Why are traditions important, and what role do they have in the life of our community? Which ones have universal significance, and which ones are based on local and cultural factors?

2. “Believers have not infrequently allowed the enemy to work through them at the very time when they should have been wholly consecrated to God and to the advancement of His work. Unconsciously they have wandered far from the way of righteousness. Cherishing a spirit of criticism and faultfinding, of pharisaical piety and pride, they have grieved away the Spirit of God and have greatly retarded the work of God’s messengers.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 125. How does one “unconsciously” wander far from the way of righteousness? What steps can a person take to avoid getting trapped in a self-righteous rut?

3. Reflect on the order of the divine worship service in your church. Why does your church have that particular order? What is the meaning of each item in the service (for example, invocation, doxology, pastoral prayer, and so on)? What lessons can you learn from the church service that help to reveal just how much tradition is interwoven in our faith? At the same time we need to ask: just because it’s tradition, and nothing else, is it bad?
The Lesson in Brief

▶Key Text: Matthew 15:8, 9

▶The Student Will:

Know: Understand that religious tradition can never replace God’s law.
Feel: Be convicted of the superiority of God’s law over tradition.
Do: Let the Holy Spirit promote the kind of righteousness that starts in the heart.

▶Learning Outline:

   A How did the religious traditions, which were originally introduced with good intentions, come to be elevated to the status of God’s Word?
   B How did Jesus differentiate between God’s law and human traditions?
   C Why was Jesus so critical of the teachings of the Pharisees?
   D How did the traditions that were meant to help people better keep the law actually make it of “none effect”?

II. Feel: God’s Law Trumps Human Tradition.
   A How can we avoid an attitude of “better than thou” when dealing with others who do not follow all the precepts of God’s law?
   B How can I let go of the security of a known routine or ritual to more closely follow the precepts of God’s law?

III. Do: Righteousness That Starts in Heart and Home
   A Rabbi means “my great one” or “my teacher.” How can a teacher help his or her students to think for themselves?
   B How can we avoid elevating our interpretations of God’s laws to the same level as the law itself?

▶Summary: While tradition has its place in the church, no human has the authority to create religious restrictions and elevate them to the level of divine law.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Matthew 15:8, 9

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: While tradition has its place in the church, no human has the authority to create religious restrictions and elevate them to the level of divine law.

Watch a child under the age of one open a gift. More likely than not, the child will be fascinated by the wrapping and will be very happy to play with the crackling paper and sample the bright ribbons, while completely ignoring the gift inside the paper. Little children sometimes even cry when the paper is taken away and seem to prefer it to the gift it enwrapped.

Many people see Jesus’ conflicts with the teachers of the law as evidence of Jesus’ disregard for the law. As we study this week, we see that, rather than disregarding the law, Jesus was intent on stripping away the “wrappings” of religious tradition and presenting the law to the people as the true gift of God, which reached into the very motives of their hearts.

Opening Activity: Imagine that a new stop sign has been placed in your town. Your job would be to see that vehicles stopped at the stop sign. Discuss the different options available, such as warning lights before the stop sign, a driver education course, advertising on the local media, having someone sit there watching for offenders, or different punishments for not stopping. Which method or methods do you think would be most effective in helping people stop at the sign? Why?

Discuss: We think of contamination as something coming from the outside. If we touch or eat something contaminated with bacteria, we will get sick. Jesus taught that spiritual contamination was different. What was it, and where did it come from according to Jesus (Matt. 15:10–20)?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Jesus’ and the early church’s struggle with tradition marks an important turning point in salvation history. The “wrappings” of tradition had clouded the perception of Jews when it came to divine law and the Messiah.

Following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the nascent Christian church made small steps to fully comprehend the significance of the
Messiah’s coming and mission. Led by the Spirit, they, slowly but surely, disassembled long-held traditions and made theological breakthroughs that were not always easy. In the following section, we will look at two crucial moments in which tradition and Scripture collided in the theological growth of the early church.

**Consider This:** What strategies did the early Christian church use to untangle the connection between God’s law and human tradition? How can these strategies be helpful in our discussion of the relationship between law and lifestyle?

I. The Temple and the Early Church *(Review Acts 2:46, 47, and Acts 3 with your class.)*

Jerusalem was not only the center of Judaism but also the birthplace of Christianity. After the ascension of Jesus, the apostles and other disciples were in the temple daily, while at the same time breaking bread in smaller house settings *(Acts 2:46, 47)*. The context suggests prayer and perhaps the reading (and interpretation) of Scripture—something that was more typical for a synagogue than the temple, which was the center for sacrifices and offerings. What was most significant, however, was the public nature of their prayer and study, which caused others to take a second look and join the group.

Acts 3:1 notes that Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer. The temple was the central place of worship for Jews living in Jerusalem, but one wonders how the early Christians dealt with sacrificial service and the daily sacrifices for Israel (or *tamid* in Hebrew). Following the healing of the paralytic in Acts 3:2–10, the two disciples use the excitement generated by the miracle to preach another evangelistic sermon, which is full of quotes from the Old Testament *(Acts 3:11–26)*. Following their arrest by the temple leadership and their defense before the Sanhedrin, the disciples are “further threatened” and then let go *(Acts 4:21)*. How did John and Peter and the others relate to this prohibition that the highest Jewish authority had pronounced? Humanly speaking, the humble fishermen should easily have been cowered into obedience or at least silenced. Yet, nothing like this happened. Their theological paradigm had been changed, and, empowered by the Spirit, they proclaimed the message of the risen Christ with boldness *(vs. 31)*. Instead of continuing to uphold the temple as the center of Jewish theology, they understood that the Lamb that had been slain, Jesus, the Christ, would have to be their theological center. The temple had become a convenient place to preach and reach the masses, but it had lost its theological significance and uniqueness.

**Consider This:** What strategies did the early Christian church use to untangle the connection between God’s law and human tradition? Can these strategies...
be helpful in our discussion of the relationship between law and lifestyle?

II. The Early Church and Gentiles  (*Review Acts 6:1–7 and Acts 10 with your class.*)

A second important change in the thinking of the early church occurred regarding its attitude toward non-Jews (or Gentiles). Jews living in the first century A.D. were not supposed to enter the home of a Gentile; it would result in their ceremonial impurity. Jesus Himself had limited His ministry to a predominantly Jewish audience—most likely because He wanted to avoid prejudice and because the gospel first needed to be preached to God’s covenant people (*Dan. 9:24, Rom. 1:16*).

The early church was still a predominantly Jewish group (compare the reference to the “Hellenists” that led to the election of deacons with a Greek background, noted in Acts 6:1–7). They preach in the temple of Jerusalem (where mostly Jews and proselytes would worship) and share the message of Jesus with those in Jerusalem. Philip, one of the newly appointed deacons (*Acts 6:1–7*), is the first to move outside the comfort zone of Judaism. Traveling to Samaria (where Samaritans lived!), he preaches the gospel to the crowds. Many heed his message and are convicted by the accompanying miracles (*Acts 8:4–8*). Later on, we find Philip on a road from Jerusalem to Gaza, conversing with an Ethiopian courtier—most likely a proselyte to Judaism—who is reading from the scroll of Isaiah (vss. 26–39). Having understood the explanations of the suffering Messiah as a reference to Jesus Christ, the Ethiopian courtier is ready to be baptized. Philip continues to preach in the non-Jewish regions of Palestine and ends up in Caesarea, where he is known as Philip the evangelist (*Acts 21:8, 9*).

While Philip had dealt with a Jewish proselyte and Samaritans (who had some connections to Jews, even though they were not highly appreciated), Peter needed direct divine intervention to help him cross the high threshold of tradition that kept the early church from actively preaching to non-Jews. *Acts* 10 describes the amazing story of two visions, one given to a Roman centurion and one given to a Jewish fisherman, and the mighty workings of the Spirit. It is remarkable to remember that this was God-appointed and not moved by a committee or a management board. As Peter prays on the roof of a home in Joppa, he sees in a vision a great sheet full of different animals coming down from heaven. In his vision, Peter hears a heavenly voice: “Kill and eat” (*Acts 10:13*). He vehemently opposes this proposition, for the sheet contained both clean and unclean animals. Three times this sequence replays in Peter’s vision, and then we find Peter wondering about the meaning of the vision.

This meaning became immediately clear when the messengers of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, knocked on the door and requested Peter to visit their master in Caesarea. Peter had nearly two days to ponder the meaning of the vision, and when he finally meets the Roman centurion with a house full of Gentiles eager to hear the Word, it all becomes clear. Mission transcends national and cultural boundaries and traditions.
**Consider This:** What steps were needed to convince and convict Peter about the importance of preaching to Gentiles? Read Acts 10 carefully and note key points.

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. The influence of the rabbis was not always negative. Look at Acts 5:27–39. What basis did Gamaliel use for his reasoning? What was the effect on the council?

2. In Britain, there is a saying, “take care of the pennies, and the pounds will take care of themselves.” Do you think that if a person could focus on, for example, lifestyle issues, then the major issues such as the Ten Commandments could be kept by default? Argue your case carefully.

3. In most ancient cultures, the wisdom and experience of older people was honored and treasured. Their advice was followed, and traditions and values were passed on through subsequent generations. In our modern world, we seem to have little time or place for our elders or traditions. Do you think this is a trend that Jesus would support in the area of religion? Why, or why not? (Think of His treatment of the teachings of the elders in Matthew 15.)

**Application Questions:**

1. Friendship is a two-way street. In order for us to have influence with others, we need to get to know them. How can we make friends with non-believers and nurture these friendships without letting ourselves be sucked into their world?

2. Jesus said, “That unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” *(Matt. 5:20, NKJV).* What hope do we have of making it into heaven?

3. The rabbis who originally penned the traditions had great respect for Scripture and had no intention of their writings being used to shift the focus from God’s Word to human tradition. What practical steps can we take to ensure that we do not let great Bible teachers, preachers, or pastors take the place of our personal connection with God’s Word?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** Imagine that you are a missionary in the territory of an unentered group of people. You want to begin a worship service. What aspects of your current Sabbath worship traditions would you keep, and which ones would you change? Why?
Christ and the Law in the Sermon on the Mount

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot, or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled’” (Matthew 5:17, 18, NKJV).

When most people think about the Sermon on the Mount, they automatically think of “the Beatitudes” (Matt. 5:1–12). However, the Sermon on the Mount actually covers three chapters that have been divided into four sections. The Beatitudes comprise only the first section. In the second, Jesus compares Christians to light and salt (Matt. 5:13–16). The third, Matthew 5:17–48, is where Jesus gives us a new and deeper perspective on the law. And then there is the final and longest section, Matthew 6:1–7:23, in which Jesus provides clear teaching on Christian behavior. The whole talk ends with the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24–27), which stresses the importance of obedience to what God calls us to do.

This week we will investigate the third section, Matthew 5:17–48 (which theologians call the antitheses, cases in which sharp contrasts are presented), to see what it teaches us about the law.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 26.
“One Jot or Tittle”

Read again Matthew 5:17–20. How interesting that Jesus would greatly emphasize the law here, while at the same time making the statement that He did about the scribes and Pharisees, who so greatly emphasized the law, as well. What important lesson does this passage teach about true obedience to the law?

Jesus begins this section with the assurance that He has not come to abolish “the Law or the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17, NKJV). Although there is no reference to it, many see this as a formulaic expression for the entire Old Testament (see also Matt. 7:12, 11:13, 22:40, Luke 16:16, Acts 13:15, 24:14, Rom. 3:21). In spite of what His opponents claimed, Jesus did not attack the very book that revealed the will of His Father. Instead, His purpose was to “fulfill” the law and the prophets, not to do away with them.

The word used for “fulfill” (plerō) literally means to “fill up” or “complete.” It carries the sense of “filling to the brim.” There are two ways to understand fulfill. One is to place the emphasis on Jesus as being the fulfillment of Scripture (for example, Luke 24:25–27, John 5:39). However, key to understanding this text is the immediate context, which shows that Jesus did not come to destroy Scripture but to reveal its inner essence.

Having established His overall intent, Jesus switched emphasis from the Old Testament in general to the law in particular. Almost as if He knew that people would one day accuse Him of abolishing the law, He cautions that as long as heaven and earth remain, the law will exist until everything “is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18, NIV). With this statement, Jesus confirms the perpetuity of the law.

In fact, the law is so important that all those who violate its precepts will be called “the least in the kingdom.” This is just a way of saying that they are wrong in what they are doing. Jesus is quick to point out that He is not promoting the empty righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees but instead a righteousness springing from a heart that loves God and seeks to do His will.
Murder (Matt. 5:21–26)

After He clarified His intention to uphold the law, Jesus started to explain a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. He begins by citing the sixth commandment (Exod. 20:13) and summarizing, from the law of Moses, the penalty for its violation (Exod. 21:12, Lev. 24:17).

The sixth commandment does not include all cases in which one person kills another. In cases of manslaughter, a person could flee to a city of refuge and gain temporary asylum (Exod. 21:13, Num. 35:12). However, one who intentionally took another’s life would receive swift judgment. In His explanation, Jesus does not focus on the act itself but on the motive and intents of the one who commits the act. One might take a life accidentally, but the person who purposes to take a life has gone through a period of deliberation. The sin took place before the person even carried out the terrible deed. Many potential murderers are stopped only by a lack of opportunity.

Read Matthew 5:22. What does Jesus equate to murder? How does 1 John 3:15 help to emphasize the point? What is the real issue here that Jesus is pointing to, and what does this tell us about the real reach of God’s law?

Though the Bible often talks about the power of words, Jesus here takes it to a deeper level. Often the sole purpose of harsh words or cursing is to evoke negative feelings in the victim. Jesus’ point is crystal clear. It’s not just those who carry through with the crime who are guilty of murder but also those who speak harsh words to others or who even harbor murderous thoughts. Jesus counsels those harboring these thoughts to reconcile with their victims before coming to the altar (Matt. 5:23–26).

Dwell on the implication of Jesus’ words in the texts for today. How well have you done in this regard? What does such a high standard tell you about the need to be covered by Christ’s righteousness at all times?
Adultery (Matt. 5:27–32)

Jesus’ next example involves commandments concerning adultery. He first cites the seventh commandment, You shall not commit adultery. In the context of the law of Moses, adultery took place when a married person was sexually involved with someone other than a spouse. The law was very clear that both parties found guilty of adultery should be put to death. As with the sixth commandment, Jesus gave the deeper implications of this particular commandment.

Adultery often starts long before the acts are committed. In the same way that murder starts with the intention to inflict permanent harm on an individual, adultery begins at the very moment when an individual lustfully desires another person, married or single, to whom he or she is not married.

Read Matthew 5:29, 30. How much more forceful could Jesus be in describing the danger of sin? After looking at these texts, read Romans 7:24. What important truths are found here?

Here, too, Jesus provides an instant remedy for those sins that have been exposed. The solution is not to follow through with the sin but to have a conversion of the heart. With strong metaphors, Jesus counsels the one who has the problem to do what is necessary if he or she wishes to enter the kingdom. This may mean taking a different route to work or terminating a cherished friendship, but eternal gain far outweighs the passions of the moment.

As we saw before, Moses permitted divorce even though he knew it was not a part of God’s original plan. After addressing married men with roaming eyes and admonishing them to control their impulses, Jesus encourages lifelong marriage fidelity.

“The surrender of the will is represented as plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand. Often it seems to us that to surrender the will to God is to consent to go through life maimed or crippled. But it is better, says Christ, for self to be maimed, wounded, crippled, if thus you may enter into life. That which you look upon as disaster is the door to highest benefit.”—Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 61. What implication might these words have for you?
Promises, Promises . . . (Matt. 5:33–37)

The first two antitheses (murder and adultery) are based on the Decalogue. The antithesis regarding divorce and the ones that follow are taken from other sections of the Mosaic law, including the one about swearing falsely and performing oaths to the Lord.

Read Leviticus 19:11–13. What specific points do we find here? See also Exod. 20:7.

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The Mosaic law, from which Jesus quotes, is listed in a section of Leviticus that condemns a number of deceptive practices. Here again it is evident that Jesus’ concern is with the intentions. Anyone who makes a promise with no intention of fulfilling it has made a conscious decision to sin.

Though the command against swearing falsely relates to promises made to other people, the second command concerns promises made to God.


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Unlike the person guilty of false swearing, the one who makes a financial pledge to God is not necessarily intending to defraud. However, Jesus knows human nature and cautions against making promises that one may later regret. Rather than making promises that may not even be in the power of the individual to fulfill, a Christian should be a person of integrity whose “yes” means “yes” and “no” means “no.”

Think about a time that you made a promise (either to a person or to God) that you intended to keep but ultimately didn’t. How can you learn to be careful about this problem? What about promises to yourself that you have reneged on?
Lex Talionis (Matt. 5:38–48)

It appears that the common theme here (Matt. 5:38–48) is revenge. This theme concerns the many commandments in the Mosaic law that are built on the principle of repaying a crime with an equal punishment, an idea called lex talionis, a Latin term meaning “law of retaliation.”

As we see in a number of passages (Exod. 21:22–25, Lev. 24:17–21, Deut. 19:21), the law called for the offender to suffer the same experience as the victim. If the victim lost an eye, arm, foot, or life, the offender must also. This “law of retaliation” was common among a number of ancient civilizations. Why not, since it seems to reveal a simple principle of justice?

It’s important to realize that this principle is there to limit retaliation; that is, to keep people from extracting more from a wrong done to them than they are rightfully entitled to extract. Thus, in many ways, this law was to ensure that justice was not perverted.

Therefore, in Matthew 5:38–42 Jesus was not necessarily attacking the legitimacy of a law that demanded a person to be punished for a crime. Instead, Jesus focused on the Christians’ response to people who try to take advantage of them. Rather than seeking opportunities for revenge, Christians should “retaliate” with kindness, something that we can do only through the grace of God working within us. In this appeal, Jesus has taken us to a deeper level in our understanding of what it means to be a follower of the Lord.

The final antithesis addresses the attitude that promotes love for friends and hatred for enemies. The command to love your neighbor is found in Leviticus 19:18. There is no explicit text that calls for hatred of enemies, even despite Deuteronomy 23:3–6.

In the context of Jesus’ world, the Jews were under foreign occupation by the Roman oppressive power and were second-class citizens in their own land. Given their oppression, they probably felt justified in hating their enemy, who at times severely oppressed them. Jesus was showing them a better way to live, even under less-than-ideal circumstances.

Read Matthew 5:44, 45. What is Jesus saying to us here? More important, in what way can you apply this teaching in your own life with someone who has done you wrong?

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Thursday

“Jesus takes up the commandments separately, and explains the depth and breadth of their requirement. Instead of removing one jot of their force, He shows how far reaching their principles are, and exposes the fatal mistake of the Jews in their outward show of obedience. He declares that by the evil thought or the lustful look the law of God is transgressed. One who becomes a party to the least injustice is breaking the law and degrading his own moral nature. Murder first exists in the mind. He who gives hatred a place in his heart is setting his feet in the path of the murderer, and his offerings are abhorrent to God.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 310.

Love is the binding principle in God’s law. In each of the antitheses, Jesus elevates the principle of love: love keeps a person from harboring hatred toward her sister; love keeps a husband and wife together; love challenges the Christian to be always honest in his dealings with others and God; love allows a person to react in kindness when he has been wronged; and love empowers the individual to treat the enemy as he himself would like to be treated.

Discussion Questions:

1. In this week’s section, Jesus said, “You have heard it has been said by them of old,” and then later said, “but I say unto you,” and then gave the antitheses. Notice that some of the sayings “of old” were direct quotes from the Bible or taken from Old Testament teachings. Thus, the problem was not with the references but with how they had been interpreted. What lesson can we take from this regarding, if not our doctrines, the way in which we interpret them? How might we be in danger of looking at things too superficially and missing the deeper meaning?

2. Many fall into the trap of interpreting texts in isolation from other texts. One such text is Matthew 5:48, where we are told to be as perfect as our Father in heaven. How does the interpretation of this text in its immediate context (Matt. 5:43–48) demonstrate the importance of careful Bible study? How would you respond to a person who claimed that this text was teaching sinlessness? What is the text really teaching, and why does this teaching reveal the true meaning of being a follower of Jesus?

3. How do the texts we studied, particularly about murder and adultery, help to show how wrong those are who claim the law was abolished after the Cross?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 22:37

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Recognize that Jesus did not come to destroy the law but to reveal its inner essence.
- **Feel:** Sense that the law addresses not just actions but motives.
- **Do:** Demonstrate Spirit-led actions, thoughts, and motives rather than outward compliance.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Keeping the Law Is Heart Work.
- **A** Why did Jesus’ opponents claim that Jesus was out to destroy the law?
- **B** What does “fulfill” mean in Matthew 5:18?
- **C** How does Jesus’ keeping of the law differ from the way the scribes and Pharisees kept the law?

II. Feel: Motive Is Everything.
- **A** Some may have accused Jesus of being soft on sin. How does Jesus’ forceful teaching in Matthew 5:29, 30 show Jesus’ revulsion toward sin?
- **B** How do the disciples feel about Jesus’ teaching on the motivation of law-keeping *(Matt. 19:10)*?
- **C** How does Jesus’ expansion of the command against swearing falsely in Matthew 5:33–37 show us that our dealings with one another and God should be based on more than fluctuating feelings?

III. Do: Surrendering to the Work of the Holy Spirit
- **A** Why do we seem to prefer having a list of things to tick off rather than having our motives changed?
- **B** How can I live so that my “yes” will mean “yes” and my “no” will mean “no” without having to resort to some kind of oath to make others believe me?

**Summary:** Jesus shows in His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that He had not come to do away with the law. Rather, He came to magnify the law and show the need for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in order to keep it.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Matthew 22:37

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God’s law cannot be viewed only as a set of rules. It is a call to a complete lifestyle commitment, empowered by the Holy Spirit in which our actions, as well as our innermost thoughts and motives, will be Spirit led.

Just for Teachers: In this week’s lesson, we grasp the far-reaching intentions of God’s law to impact all aspects of our lives and the approach we should take to it. We see that God’s law is not meant to be debated in a theoretical way but must penetrate the very fiber of our being.

The story is told of a rich man who had a mansion nestled on the side of a high mountain. The only way to reach the house was by means of a dangerous mountain road with a sheer cliff on one side. The rich man was in need of a new chauffeur and advertised the job. Three men responded to the advertisement. Tom, the first to be interviewed, felt quite confident; after all, he had been a racecar driver. Strangely, during the interview, the rich man only asked one question: “How close to the edge of the cliff can you drive?” Tom felt that this was the moment to tell the rich man about his excellent vehicle control and point out that he had never lost a race or lost control of his racecar even at high speeds. “But how close can you drive?” insisted the rich man. After some quick mental calculations, Tom replied, “I think I could safely handle a vehicle to within a meter [three feet] of the edge.” Sam, the next to be interviewed, felt even more confident. After all, he had done some stunt driving for a movie. He was fearless behind the wheel. When asked how close to the edge of the cliff he could drive, he quickly replied, “I could take any vehicle to within half a meter [one and a half feet] of the edge and even have a wheel slightly overlap the side without a problem!” Joe, the last to be interviewed, had no particular claim to driving fame. “So Joe, how close to the edge of the cliff can you drive?” the rich man asked. “I don’t know, sir. I’m afraid of heights, so I will just stay as far away from the edge as possible.” Joe got the job.

Opening Activity: After sharing the story presented above, ask class members if they agreed with the rich man’s choice for his chauffeur. What attitudes did Tom, Sam, and Joe display toward the law of gravity? After all, none of them were deliberately planning on breaking any safe-driving laws.

Discuss: How were Tom’s and Sam’s attitudes similar to Jewish thinking about the law in the time of Christ?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Kingdom of God Sermon (Review Matthew 5:17–48 with your class.)

Matthew 5:17–48 describes a key moment of Jesus’ ministry and is part and parcel of the larger Sermon on the Mount. Situated chronologically at the beginning of His ministry, the ideas and concepts contained in this section represent the proverbial line in the sand as Jesus distinguishes the kingdom of God from the kingdom of the ruler of this world. God’s kingdom is salt and light and composed of people who are willing to make a difference (vss. 13–16).

Right from the outset, Jesus deflates a question that may have arisen in the minds of the Pharisees and scribes as they undoubtedly listened very carefully to the young Rabbi from Nazareth: “‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill’” (vs. 17, NKJV). The Greek term that the NKJV translates as “destroy” can also be translated as “nullify,” “abolish,” “demolish,” or “dismantle.” Jesus did not come to demolish or nullify the Law and the Prophets (which is shorthand for the complete divine revelation of the Old Testament, in other words, Scripture); He came to fulfill.

Right at this juncture it would be good to pause for a moment and consider the etymology of “fulfill.” The Greek form of fulfill is closely related to filling, and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX or Septuagint) uses exactly this verb to describe the Creator’s command to His creatures to fill the earth (Gen. 1:22, 28). The incarnate Word that created the world through His word (John 1:1–3) is about to fill in the blanks that a mere “you shall not kill” or a simple “you shall not commit adultery” left open. Human reason would find these commandments pretty self-explanatory, and yet, Jesus as the Lawgiver drills deeper.

Consider This: Why did Jesus emphasize that the kingdom of God has come?

II. “You Have Heard . . . but I Tell You” (Study the six antitheses Jesus proposes in Matthew 5 with your class.)

Jesus uses six antitheses that help us to understand that action is only one element of human compliance with the law. Jesus not only reminds us that God considers motivation and thoughts as much as action but, by using this antithetical structure, He also indirectly claims to be on the same level as the Divine Lawgiver. The antitheses cover murder (Matt. 5:21–26), adultery (vss. 27–30), divorce (vss. 31, 32), oaths (vss. 33–37), retaliation (vss. 38–42), and love toward enemies (vss. 43–47). It is highly significant to note that
not all of these examples represent the Ten Commandments. Divorce and oaths could be classified as civil laws, while retaliation and love for enemies should be considered underlying theological (or philosophical) foundations. Jesus very purposefully selects different levels of the divinely ordained law to impress on His listeners the fact that law-keeping without the Lawgiver is impossible and not germane to the human domain. Put differently, by including thoughts, attitudes, and underlying motivations within the bandwidth of the law, Jesus clearly highlights the impossibility of human beings—you and I—ever being able to keep the law (with all its different levels and motivations) by ourselves. Even with our best intentions we find ourselves at the feet of the Lawgiver who stepped from Sinai to Golgotha to provide both a perfect example and a perfect salvation that is available to all who accept His gift.

**Consider This:** In what ways does Jesus challenge us to keep the law more strictly than even the Pharisees did?

III. “Be Perfect, Just as Your Father in Heaven Is Perfect” *(Study Matthew 5:48 with your class.)*

This crucial section concludes with another statement that shakes our foundations and, unfortunately, has often been taken out of context: “‘Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect’” *(Matt. 5:48, NKJV).*

Jesus highlights two spheres of perfection: “‘You shall be perfect’” refers to His listeners. This is linked to another sphere of perfection: “‘as your Father in heaven is perfect.’” Ellen G. White’s statement, “as God is perfect in His sphere, so we are to be perfect in ours” clearly alludes to these two different levels of perfection *(Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 574).* Deuteronomy 32:4 describes God’s perfection: “‘He is the Rock, His work is perfect’” *(NKJV)*, while Isaiah 64:6 underlines the fact that “our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” *(NKJV).* Jesus—the Lawgiver, Creator, and Savior—however, bridges this abyss that separates our lack of perfection and God’s complete perfection. “‘I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one’” *(John 17:23, NKJV).* Biblical perfection, then, has two levels, God’s perfect Oneness within the Godhead and humanity’s perfect oneness with Christ.

Here is an illustration for humanity’s perfect oneness with Christ, taken from Robert J. Ross: “Scientists have recently discovered a way to make the first 100 percent completely flat and smooth surface on machined and highly polished glass. It is so flat and smooth that when two of these thick sheets of glass are slid one over the other, displacing all the air, the bond between the molecules becomes so great that it is near impossible to separate the two sheets of glass. They are truly one. Jesus’ perfect oneness with the Father through His obedience here on earth becomes our robe of (His) righteousness imputed to us for all of eternity. The righteousness that He wants to impart to us is the perfect
oneness we can have through His Spirit’s leading. Obedience motivated by genuine love allows Him daily to grind and polish us until we are absolutely bonded as one in Him that we will be nearly impossible to separate.” —“Perfection,” Adventist World, December 2009, p. 21.

Consider This: How does the overall drive of the Sermon on the Mount help us to understand Jesus’ call for perfection?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. In Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5, He emphasizes the motivation and thoughts behind the law. How are we judged—by our motivation or by our deeds? Give biblical support for your answer. (Hint: See Ezekiel 24:14.)

2. If sin is not just the act itself but begins in the mind, when does a temptation become a sin?

3. What is the difference between “turning the other cheek” or going the “extra mile” and being the passive victim (Matt. 5:38–42)? (See Thursday’s discussion of Christian “retaliation.”)

Application Questions:

1. After reading Matthew 5:23–26, consider how far you should go in trying to make up with someone who holds a grudge against you. How does the need for reconciliation affect your relationship with God?

2. Jesus takes the commandment of not committing adultery further by saying that anyone who looks with lust is breaking this commandment. Is this teaching still valid in our world, in which we are bombarded by advertising designed to play on our sexual desires?

3. According to the popular bumper sticker wisdom “Don’t get mad—get even,” how can we handle situations that make us angry? Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is not telling us to calmly accept abuse but to “retaliate” with unexpected kindness. How is this possible?

►STEP 4—Create

Activity: John has a terrible neighbor. The man lets his dog dirty John’s lawn without cleaning it up, plays loud music on Friday nights until late, and has even been seen tossing trash over the fence into John’s yard. As a class, suggest some practical ways in which John can “heap burning coals on his head” (Prov. 25:21, 22, NIV).
Christ and the Sabbath

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV).

The vast majority of Christian denominations observe Sunday as the day of “rest” and worship (even though the vast majority of Sunday keepers don’t really rest on Sunday). Sunday “keeping” is so prevalent among modern Christians that many believe the day to be the “Christian Sabbath.”

This was not always the case. On the contrary, as a continuation of the Israelite faith, Christianity did not discard all of the symbols of its parent religion, including the seventh-day Sabbath. For a time, the only Bible that early Christians had to guide them was the Old Testament. No wonder, then, that the issue of an alternative day of worship was not introduced into Christianity until more than a century after Christ ascended to heaven. Furthermore, it was not until the fourth century, with the edict of Constantine, that Sunday observance became the policy of the dominant church. Unfortunately, even after the Protestant Reformation, almost all Christianity has adhered to keeping Sunday, despite the Bible teaching that the seventh day remains the true Sabbath.

This week’s lesson will cover Christ and the Sabbath.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 3.
The Jewish Sabbath? *(Exod. 20:8–11)*

Although many refer to the seventh day as the “Jewish Sabbath,” the Bible reveals that the Sabbath predates the Jews by many centuries. Its roots go back to the Creation itself.

Genesis 2:1–3 declares that after God had completed His acts of Creation in six days, He rested on the seventh day and then “blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (*NIV*). This clearly shows the high place of the Sabbath in God’s creation. In addition to the blessing, the Sabbath was also “made holy.” In other words, God applied some of His own qualities to this monument in time.

**Compare** the two Sabbath commandments in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. In what ways do these relate to the theory that the Sabbath is not only for Jews?

The most notable difference between the two commandments is the rationale for Sabbath observance. Exodus makes a direct reference to Genesis 2:3 as it elevates the fact that God both “blessed” and “made holy” the Sabbath day. On the other hand, Deuteronomy 5:15 points to Israel’s divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage as being a rationale for Sabbath keeping. On the basis of the Deuteronomy text, many believe the Sabbath is only for the Jews. However, this argument totally ignores the fact that the Exodus text points to the Creation, when God established Sabbath for all humanity.

Furthermore, the Deuteronomy 5:15 reference to deliverance from Egypt is symbolic of the salvation we have in Christ. Hence, the Sabbath is a symbol not only of Creation but also of Redemption, two themes that are linked with each other in the Bible (*Heb. 1:1–3, Col. 1:13–20, John 1:1–14*). Only by the fact that Jesus is our Creator could He also be our Redeemer, and the seventh-day Sabbath is a symbol of His work as both.

Anyone can claim to be resting in Christ. In your own experience, how does keeping the seventh-day Sabbath help you to find that rest?
A Time for Rest and Worship (Luke 4:16)

According to Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2, the preincarnate Christ was directly involved in the creation process. These texts declare that all created things came into existence through Him. Paul further expresses that Christ had a part in creating “invisible” things (Col. 1:16, 17), which would, of course, include the Sabbath. Although Christ was central in the creative process, when He was transformed into human flesh, He subjected Himself to His Father’s commandments (John 15:10). As earlier lessons showed, Jesus was opposed to certain traditions and used every opportunity to correct religious behavior that was not grounded in the will of God. If Jesus had intended to abolish the Sabbath commandment, He had plenty of opportunities to do just that.

Most of the Sabbath texts in the Old Testament speak of the Sabbath as a day of rest. The understanding of “rest” in many modern languages may lead some to believe that the Sabbath should be spent sleeping and generally relaxing. While we can definitely enjoy these activities on the Sabbath, the true meaning of rest is “cessation,” “stop,” or “pause.” The Sabbath is a time when we can take a break from the routine labor of the first six days and spend special time with the Creator.

By the time of Christ, the Jews were holding a weekly divine worship service on the Sabbath (see Luke 4:16). Those who lived in Jerusalem would attend special prayer services in the temple, where the liturgy was different from what it was on the other days of the week. Jews who lived in other parts of the world developed the synagogue as a place of social gathering and worship. On Sabbaths, as long as a minimum of ten males was present (a minyan), a divine worship service could take place.

What do the following texts inform us about Sabbath keeping among the earliest Christians? What does this tell us about those who claim the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in honor of the resurrection? Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; Heb. 4:9.

Given their Jewish roots, it was only natural for early Christians to worship on the day prescribed in the Old Testament. Yet, almost twenty years after the ascension of Jesus, it was still Paul’s “custom” to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2). Thus, no biblical evidence shows that the first Christians kept Sunday instead of Sabbath.
A Time for Enjoyment (Mark 2:27, 28)

Many who claim to keep the Sabbath do not always understand what Sabbath keeping entails. As did some of the Pharisees in Jesus’ time, people even today have imprisoned the Sabbath behind rigid walls of rules and regulations (while others have almost made it a day no different than any other). The Sabbath is supposed to be a delight, not a burden, but it is still a day to be kept holy.

During the time when Jesus walked this earth, some of the religious leaders had surrounded the Sabbath with 39 other commandments. They reasoned that if people could keep the 39 laws, then the Sabbath would be perfectly kept. As a result of this well-intentioned law-making, the Sabbath—which was intended to be a joy—did, indeed, become a yoke to many.

Carefully read Mark 2:23–28. Why did the disciples pluck grain? Does the text indicate that Jesus participated with the disciples? What biblical laws were being violated, if any?

As Jesus and His hungry disciples walked through a field one Sabbath, the disciples decided to satisfy their hunger by plucking grain. Although it was not their field, their actions were permissible under the law of Moses (see Deut. 23:25), even if the Pharisees interpreted it as a violation of another Mosaic law that forbade plowing and harvesting on the Sabbath (see Exod. 34:21). Apparently, Jesus did not partake of the grain; nonetheless, He took the time to defend the disciples’ actions. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that even David and his men had eaten the “forbidden” sanctuary bread when hungry.

In Mark 2:27, 28, Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humans, not vice versa. In other words, the Sabbath was not made to be worshiped, but rather to provide opportunities for worship. As God’s gift to all humans, the Sabbath is not meant to oppress but to provide release and liberation. It is truly a way to experience our rest and freedom in Christ.

What are some things that you can do on the Sabbath that you can’t so easily do other days of the week? Think through this question, and bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

When God created the world, He pronounced that everything was “very good” (Gen. 1:31), no doubt perfect in every way. However, with the advent of sin, the creation has been corrupted with evil, an impact seen everywhere. Humans, though created in the image of God, became subject to sickness, deterioration, and death. We often say that death is part of life; death, though, is the negation of life, not part of it. Death was never meant to be something that we experience.

Given God’s original plan for humanity, it is no surprise that some of Jesus’ most dramatic healing miracles took place on the Sabbath.


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Each of the Sabbath-healing miracles is spectacular and serves to demonstrate the true meaning of Sabbath. Before Jesus healed the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1–6), He asked the rhetorical question, “‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’” (Mark 3:4, NKJV). If a person has an opportunity to relieve suffering on the day of liberation, why shouldn’t he do it? In fact, the miracle with the woman who had a bent back powerfully demonstrates the liberating purpose of the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17). When criticized for the healing, Jesus asked, “‘Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’” (Luke 13:16, NIV).

The theme of liberation is also present in the accounts of the healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda, who had been sick for 38 years (John 5:1–9), and the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–14). In response to the Pharisees’ charge that Jesus broke the Sabbath with His healing miracles, He reminded them, “‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working’” (John 5:17, NIV). If God did not allow the healing, it would not have happened. When it comes to relieving human misery, God does not rest.

What should we learn from the mistakes of these religious leaders about how preconceived notions can so blind us to even the most obvious of truths?
A New Creation

Sabbath not only reminds us of God’s creative ability, but it points to His restorative promises. Indeed, with every healing of a person on the Sabbath, the promise of eternal restoration was powerfully reinforced. In its own unique way, the Sabbath provides a view that reaches back to earth’s earliest history and stretches forward to humanity’s eventual destiny. Again, we can say that the Sabbath points both to Creation and to Redemption.

God created this world once already. Due to sin, however, His creation has been defiled, but this defiling will not last forever. A key element of the plan of salvation is restoration—not just of the earth but, even more important, of people, beings made in His image who will be restored to that image and who will live on the new earth. The same God who made the first earth, whose work we celebrate every seventh day, will create the earth again. (Think about how important remembering our creation must be that we are commanded to do it once a week in a special way.)

Read the following texts. What message does each one have that can be linked to the meaning of the Sabbath?

Isa. 65:17_________________________________________________

Isa. 66:22_________________________________________________

2 Pet. 3:9–13_______________________________________________

Rev. 21:1_________________________________________________

2 Cor. 5:17________________________________________________

Gal. 6:15_________________________________________________

Rev. 21:5_________________________________________________

The Sabbath “declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. . . . The Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.” —Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 288, 289.

What practical things can you do to allow the power of God to sanctify you? That is, what choices do you make on a daily basis that either help or hinder this creative process in you?
Further Study: “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends ‘in one point,’ manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes ‘guilty of all.’ James 2:10.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 582.

Discussion Questions:

1. Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study, a fuller rendition of the reference used in the introduction to this quarter. How does the Sabbath and what has happened to the Sabbath in Christendom help us to understand Satan’s attack on the law of God?

2. In the following texts (Mark 3:2, Luke 13:14, John 5:18, 9:16) Jesus is charged with breaking the Sabbath. Review Exodus 20:8–11 and evaluate the merit of this charge. What do you say to those who claim that these passages provide evidence that Jesus broke the Sabbath?

3. In class go over your answer to the final question at the end of Tuesday’s study. That is, what are some things that the Sabbath frees you up to do that on other days of the week you might not be able to do because of worldly obligations?

4. Review your own Sabbath experience. Is the Sabbath for you a day of liberation, rest, and freedom or a day of foreboding, bondage, and stress? How can you learn to enjoy the Sabbath, to make it a delight, as we are told to do in this verse: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words” (Isa. 58:13)?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Mark 2:27

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that the Sabbath is still a symbol of Creation and is also the symbol of our Redemption.

Feel: Experience Sabbath as a time of release and liberation.

Do: Find delight in keeping the Sabbath.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: A Timeless Sign

A Why did Jesus’ opponents charge Him with Sabbath breaking?

B How did Jesus defend His disciples’ behavior on the Sabbath in Mark 2:23–28?

C Where did the Sabbath originate, and what does this tell us about who the Sabbath was meant for?

II. Feel: A Celebration of Freedom

A How can we come to see Sabbath as a day of delight?

B Why did Jesus take the opportunity to relieve suffering on Sabbath?

C How do you feel about sleeping in on Sabbath morning and missing church?

III. Do: The Crowning Event of the Week

A Jesus asked, “‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?’” (Mark 3:4, NASB). Does this mean that we should spend our Sabbaths doing emergency relief work? Where is the place for worship or relaxation? How do we strike the right balance?

B What can you do to make the Sabbath a delight for those around you?

C How can you keep the Sabbath without resorting to a list of things that you cannot do on Sabbath?

Summary: Jesus, as the Creator of the Sabbath during the Creation week, did not come to nullify Sabbath observance but rather to restore it as a symbol of Creation, as well as Redemption.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Mark 2:27

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Sabbath is a way to truly experience rest and freedom in Christ.

Just for Teachers: The case is often made that, even though there is no solid biblical evidence for Sunday keeping, Christians worship on Sunday to commemorate Jesus’ great sacrifice on our behalf. The following story could be used as a basis for discussing this argument.

Marcelle had no idea that she was about to make a shocking discovery as she walked into her mom’s room. Mom had gotten out a large cardboard box and was rummaging through the papers in the box. “What are you looking for, Mom?” Marcelle asked. “A copy of your birth certificate,” Mom replied. For a few moments, Marcelle and her mom searched the box together. “Ah, here it is, but Mom, something is wrong! This birth certificate says I was born on October 7. You know my birthday is March 16.” “Honey, don’t pay any attention to that little old piece of paper! That date was just for the folks at the hospital. Your dad and I changed your birthday to March 16 in honor of your uncle Max. That’s the day he quit smoking. Now that’s something worth celebrating, don’t you think?” For a moment, Marcelle remained speechless and then she blurted out, “March 16 isn’t my real birthday?” Mom tried to console Marcelle by explaining that it had now become a family tradition and the October date was really not a good time for a celebration as they always had so much yard work then. “Besides, does the day really matter?” Mom asked. (This story is based on the Birthday Switcheroo tract by Randy Fishell.)

Discuss: Would you feel loved and respected if you were Marcelle? Did her parents have any legal grounds for making the date change? How does this story relate to Sabbath versus Sunday keeping?

Opening Activity: Invite class members to share their favorite Sabbath activity. Highlight the importance of activities that build relationships with God and others, as well as help us find rest.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus and the Sabbath (Review Jesus’ visit to the synagogue of Nazareth in Luke 4 with your class.)
We usually find Jesus in the synagogue or temple on Sabbaths. Luke is very explicit when he retells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus in relation to the Sabbath: “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16, NKJV; italics added). As He is invited to read from the scroll assigned to this particular Sabbath’s reading, Jesus reads about the Messiah’s work as depicted in Isaiah 61:1, 2. The Spirit-guided Anointed One was to preach good news to the poor; He was to proclaim freedom for prisoners; He was to restore sight for the blind and release the oppressed. What an explosive message! As Jesus put down the scroll, Luke tells us that He added one sentence: “‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21, NKJV). The exchange that followed led to a furious mob trying to Lynch the most famous Son of Nazareth.

Consider This: How would you feel if somebody were to stand up in your Sabbath School class and claim to be a prophet? How would you react, particularly if you knew that member? How should we react in moments when our worldviews and experiences are profoundly shaken?

II. Sabbath and Conflict (Review the Sabbath miracle of John 5 with your class.)

It seems that many conflicts with the leadership and religious specialists began on a Sabbath day. While not specifically seeking theological confrontation, Jesus often used His Sabbath sermons or healings to highlight important theological concepts that clashed with the traditional Jewish theology of the day.

One of the most significant passages dealing with Sabbath and conflict in the ministry of Jesus can be found in John 5. Initially, the reader is not made aware of when Jesus visits the pool of Bethesda, where a great number of sick people waited for healing. Jesus singles out an “invalid” who had been sick for 38 years—a lifetime (ESV). Jesus sees and knows and asks the man the obvious. “‘Do you want to get well?’” (vs. 6, NIV). The sick man’s answer suggests that he was unable to move by himself, perhaps suffering from some type of paralysis. He couldn’t make it in time to the pool after the water had moved. Note how Jesus heals in this instant: the Living Word speaks the man to health. Three imperatives (“get up, take up your bed, and walk,” vs. 8, ESV) mean the difference between languishing in suffering and healing. At once, the man was healed; he picked up the mat, a reminder of his past, and started walking.

By this point, the reader has been drawn into the narrative. We can see and smell and hear the countless sick. We listen in on the conversation that Jesus had with the nameless man, wondering about that first question and marveling at the power of His word. We rejoice with the man as
he gets up and walks, and then we are, as noted by Seventh-day Adventist scholar Sigve K. Tonstad, “caught completely off guard by the implications of the next sentence, charged as an unexpected negative: ‘Now that day was the Sabbath’ (5:9).” —The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), p. 183.

The following section describes the dialogue between “the Jews” (usually Jewish leadership in John) and the healed man (John 5:10–13). It sounds more like an interrogation in a white-tiled, stuffy police station. The logical sequence goes like this: “Since it is Sabbath, you cannot carry your mat, because the law forbids you to do so. So, on whose authority have you picked up your mat?”

There is no joy shared here with the newly restored child of God. There is no oohing and aahing about the muscle tone and athletic gait of somebody whose body had been characterized by atrophy and the incapacity to move freely. In John 9:14, which describes another Sabbath miracle by Jesus, involving a blind man, John did not include this narrative to document more healings. This narrative and the previous one in John 5 were chosen because they focus upon Sabbath keeping and Jesus’ relation to the law. John provides a clue for this in his reference to the carrying of the mat and the making of the mud in John 9:6. In other words, Jesus purposefully chose the Sabbath to underscore the fact that He is One with God the Father (compare with John 5:18). His word is creative, and John emphasizes the Creation Word in his prologue (John 1:1–18). Since the rationale of Sabbath is based on Creation (Exod. 20:8–11), the Sabbath healings create an important link to the law and the Lawgiver.

Consider This: What basic difference regarding the purpose of Sabbath keeping can you see between Jesus’ and the Pharisees’ activities on Sabbath?

III. God’s Signature Statement (Review Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 with your class.)

As noted by Tonstad, the Sabbath healings also speak about the character of God (and, by extension, Jesus): “Jesus’ insistence on healing on the Sabbath is best understood when we see the Sabbath not as the prized possession of the Jews but as God’s signature statement. In effect, Jesus is delivering on the original commitment invested in the seventh day at Creation.” —The Lost Meaning of the Sabbath, p. 197. Jesus not only re-creates, He is also partaking in fellowship with those who are downtrodden and marginalized, as God shared the first Sabbath with Adam and Eve. Jesus communicates that God cares about people and that the Sabbath is both a memorial to Creation and to Redemption (Deut. 5:12–15). His calculated conflict with Jewish leadership helps to crystallize His self-identity, His mission, and His theology. The Lawgiver unmistakably
explains His law more clearly by His actions.

**Consider This:** We often have an image of Jesus as a mild and gracious Redeemer—something we can see, undoubtedly, in many key moments of His ministry. Why, then, would He provoke the Jewish leadership so much with His numerous Sabbath healings involving physical activity?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. In an age of mass communication, why do we bother to still have churches and come to church? Wouldn’t it be easier to stay home and watch top-quality sermons and music on Hope Channel or 3ABN?
2. Sabbath is not meant to restrict and oppress but to provide rest, release, and joy. How can Sabbath keeping be a way of expressing our freedom and joy in Christ?
3. What did Jesus mean by saying, “‘My father is always at his work... and I too am working,’ ” when charged by the Pharisees with Sabbath breaking *(John 5:17, NIV)*?
4. Think for a moment of our name: Seventh-day Adventist. How does the seventh-day Sabbath point toward the Second Coming? (Hint: Think of the relation between Creation and re-creation.)

**Application Questions:**

1. Why do you come to church on Sabbath? What is your favorite part of the worship service? How can you make the other parts more meaningful?
2. What practical steps can we take as individuals or as a church family to make the Sabbath a delight and still a day to be kept holy?
3. What activities are endorsed as acceptable Sabbath activities in your culture? Are these based on sound biblical principles or traditions?
4. In what ways can we improve our Sabbath keeping experience? How can we keep from becoming so exhausted during the week that we have no energy left on Sabbath to enjoy it?

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**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** Sally is a newly baptized Seventh-day Adventist with two young children. Her husband is not interested in religion. She accepts that the Sabbath is God’s holy day and wants to keep it, but she isn’t sure how she should go about keeping it. What practical advice would you, as a class, give her?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 7:1–6; 7:7–13; 8:5–8; Rom. 4:15; Acts 13:38, 39; Gal. 3:10.

Memory Text: “In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:4, NRSV).

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.

This week we’ll look at the death of Jesus and what it means in relation to the law.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 10.
Dead to the Law *(Rom. 7:1–6)*

**Carefully** examine Romans 7:1–6 and summarize as well as you can what Paul is saying. Read it carefully, keeping in mind other Bible passages about the law.

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Although some Bible versions incorrectly translate verse one to read that the law is binding until death, a literal interpretation is: “every living person is under the rule of law.” The emphasis is not on the dead but on the living.

The example from marriage demonstrates that any married person who has an intimate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse has broken the law and is guilty of adultery. Only if his or her spouse dies can he or she enter a relationship with another person without violating the law.

Also, some argue that this passage shows the death of the law; however, it really shows a person’s death to the law through the body of Christ *(Rom. 7:4)*. According to Romans 6:6, the part of the person that dies is “the old self.” When united to the old self, the person is condemned by the law and thus trapped in a miserable relationship *(Rom. 7:9–11, 24)*. After the old self dies, the person is free to enter into a relationship with another—the resurrected Christ *(Rom. 7:4)*.

What Paul is saying is that because law binds every living person, God’s law must also govern the new union. However, the fact that the believer is now married to Christ means that the law is no longer an instrument of condemnation; the believer in Jesus is free from the condemnation of the law because he or she is covered in the righteousness of Jesus.

Paul is not stating that the Ten Commandments, which define sin, are now abolished; that would be contrary to so much of the Bible, his own writings included. Instead, he is talking about a new relationship one has to the law through faith in Jesus. The law still is binding; it’s just that for the believer in Jesus, the one who died to self and to sin, the law no longer holds him or her in the grip of condemnation because the person now “belongs to another,” Jesus.
The Law of Sin and Death (Rom. 8:1–8)

Paul assures the Christian that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1, 2, NKJV). If we read these verses apart from their immediate context, it would appear that Paul was referring to two opposing laws: the law of life and the law of sin and death. However, the difference is not with the law but with the individual before and after he or she receives Christ.

In what ways does Paul’s discussion in Romans 7:7–13 illustrate the role of the law?

The function of the law depends on the person with whom it is associated. The same knife, for instance, can be used by a surgeon to heal or by a murderer to kill. In the same way, a thief who breaks a law to steal someone’s purse will stand in a different relationship to the law than will the one whom the law was meant to protect (the owner of the purse). The law itself is described as “holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12, NASB), or as the “law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2, NASB). However, in the same way that God’s retributive vengeance does not stop Him from being a God of love, the law’s function as an agent of sin and death does not make it sinful.

According to Romans 8:5–8, the law is an instrument of “sin and death” for those who “set their minds on the things of the flesh” (Rom. 8:5, NASB). This describes the person who is still married to the “old self” and has no apparent desire to sever the relationship and be joined to the resurrected Christ. As a result of the sinful union, the person finds himself or herself “at enmity” with God and His law since they are on opposing sides (Rom. 8:7).

Paul then emphasizes that it is impossible for the “mind set on the flesh” to submit to God’s law, or even to please Him (Rom. 8:7, 8, NASB). This is obviously not a reference to the struggling individual of Romans 7:13–25, since that person serves the law of God “with my mind” (Rom. 7:25, NASB). Paul is probably referring to those who by their wickedness “suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18, NASB). It is for these rebels against God’s sovereignty that the law becomes an instrument of sin and death (Rom. 2:12).

How do you relate to the law when you violate it?
The Power of the Law

According to Romans 4:15, 5:13, and 7:7, what is the function of the law? Also, what does Romans 7:8–11 say about the effect that the law has on the person who violates it?

Every instrument has its purpose. Just as a key is used for opening a lock or a knife is used for cutting, so the law is used to define sin. Had it not been for God’s law, there would be no absolute method of knowing what actions were acceptable or unacceptable to Him. And though sin cannot exist without the law, Paul makes it clear that the law is not a willing partner with sin: “Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure” (Rom. 7:13, NRSV).

In what ways do the above texts help to shed light on 1 Corinthians 15:54–58?

If read in isolation, 1 Corinthians 15:54–58 would appear to promote a negative view of God’s law. Paul’s point, however, is that the law “empowers” sin only because it defines what sin is. And, of course, the “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Had it not been for the law, there would be no death because it would be impossible to define sin. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s purpose is not to demonize the law but to demonstrate how, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, all who believe can experience victory over death, a death that comes because of violation of the law.

When was the last time that someone sinned against you; that is, the last time that someone violated God’s law in a way that hurt you? How does such an experience help us to understand why the belief that states that God’s law was abolished after the Cross is so wrong?
The Impotent Law

Though in one sense, as we saw, the law “empowers” sin, in another real way the law is terribly impotent. How can the same object be both powerful and impotent at the same time?

Here again, the difference lies not in the law but in the person. For the one who discovers that he is a sinner, the law forces him to acknowledge that he is going against God’s will and is consequently on a path to death. Upon discovering his sinfulness, the sinner may decide to follow the law to the letter. However, the fact that he has already sinned has made him a candidate for death.

Read Acts 13:38, 39, Romans 8:3, and Galatians 3:21. What do they tell us about the law and salvation?

Some people believe that strict adherence to the law will grant salvation, but this is not a biblical teaching. The law defines sin (Rom. 7:7); it does not forgive it (Gal. 2:21). Hence, Paul remarks that the same law that empowers sin is also “weak” (Rom. 8:3). It is able to convict the sinner of sins but cannot make the sinner righteous. A mirror can show us our faults; it just can’t fix them. As Ellen G. White wrote: “The law cannot save those whom it condemns; it cannot rescue the perishing.”—Signs of the Times, November 10, 1890.

When we fully consider the purpose of the law, it is easier to understand why Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for the human race. The death of Jesus placed formerly sinful human beings in a right relationship with God and with His “holy and righteous and good” law (Rom. 7:12, NASB). At the same time, too, His death showed us the futility of salvation by keeping the law. After all, if obedience to the law could save us, Jesus would not have had to die in our place. The fact that He did reveals that obedience to the law could not save us. We needed something much more drastic.

Though we are promised again and again the power to obey God’s law, why is this obedience not enough to secure our salvation? In one sense the answer shouldn’t be that difficult. Look at yourself and your law-keeping. If your salvation depended upon your obedience, how much hope would you have?
The Curse of the Law (Gal. 3:10–14)

**What** do the following texts tell us about human nature? How do we see the reality of this truth every day? Ps. 51:5, Isa. 64:6, and Rom. 3:23.

With the exception of Christ, all human beings have a common experience in that all have been infected by Adam’s sin. Consequently, no natural person can ever claim to be fully righteous. There are some, such as Elijah and Enoch, who lived exceptionally close to God, but no one has been able to live a completely blameless life. Indeed, it is with this reality in mind that Paul declares: “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law’ ” (Gal. 3:10, NRSV). The truth is, the law demands total and complete conformity, and who has ever always given that, except Jesus?

**How** does Romans 6:23 help to define what the “curse of the law” means? See also Gen. 2:17 and Ezek. 18:4.

Everyone is naturally under the curse of the law. Because the law has no margin for error, it is impossible for a person to correct a past sin. Consequently, death is the individual’s fate. James paints an even bleaker picture by reminding us that transgression in one area of the law is just as bad as transgression in all areas (James 2:10). The wages of sin is death, and death has no proportions.

When we recognize the helpless condition of those under the curse, it is easier to appreciate the extent of God’s love: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NKJV). Through His death, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13, NIV).

Think about what Paul said: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (Gal. 3:10, RSV). This is because the law can’t save us; thus, we are cursed with death. How can acknowledging this truth help us to better appreciate what we have been given in Jesus? In what ways do we manifest such appreciation in our lives? See 1 John 5:3.

“The law requires righteousness,—a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can ‘be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’ Rom. 3:26.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 762.

In summary, the death of Jesus powerfully demonstrated the permanence of God’s law. When our first parents sinned, God could have abolished His laws and taken away the penalties for violation. However, this would have meant a miserable existence in a lawless society for the earth’s inhabitants. Instead, God chose to send His Son as a Substitute for us, in that He received the just penalty for sin as required by the law on behalf of all people. Through Jesus’ death, the entire race stands in a new relationship to God. This means that any one of us, through faith in Jesus, can have our sins forgiven and stand perfect in God’s sight.

Discussion Questions:

1. Many religions teach that at the end of a person’s life God balances the person’s good deeds against the bad deeds before determining whether that person will be rewarded in the afterlife. What is so terribly wrong with this kind of thinking?

2. Jesus, the One who was equal to God, died for our sins. If we think that obedience to the law can somehow add to that, in terms of saving us, what does this say about the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice?

3. What are some other reasons why the belief that states that God’s law was abolished after the Cross is false? When people say that, what do they really mean was abolished; that is, what commandment do they think was abolished?
The Lesson in Brief

➤**Key Text:** Romans 8:1

➤**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that Jesus’ death did not do away with the law.
**Feel:** Be aware of the need for a right relationship with God and His holy law.
**Do:** Accept, through faith, Jesus’ forgiveness for sins and understand that we stand perfect in God’s sight.

➤**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: God’s Eternal Law**
   A In what way is the law “weak” (Rom. 8:3)?
   B What was the curse of the law that Christ redeemed us from (Gal. 3:13)?
   C Why couldn’t God have abolished His laws and taken away the penalties for its violation when man sinned?

II. **Feel: Which Side of the Law Matters?**
   A How does the law help us define relationships?
   B If the law was done away with on the cross, why would we have no right to feel offended when someone lies to us or steals from us?

III. **Do: Set Free to Serve**
   A How should we react after looking into the mirror of the law?
   B Why would keeping the law, even through the power of the Holy Spirit, still not be enough to save you?
   C How can I show my acceptance of, and appreciation for, being freed from the curse of death?

➤**Summary:** Jesus’ death did not do away with the law. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, all who believe can experience victory over death, which comes because of violation of the law.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** Romans 8:1

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Jesus’ death did not destroy the law but paid the penalty for sin, putting us in a new relationship with God and His law.

**Just for Teachers:** The theology that teaches that the law, including the Ten Commandments, was abolished after Jesus died, is very prevalent in Christian circles. This theology is based on verses taken out of their immediate context. It is important never to base a theology on one verse alone but always look at the immediate context, as well as the larger themes of the Bible, in order to understand the meaning of a text.

The role of the law in the life of a Christian has long been debated. Even in the early Christian church, some felt that salvation depended, at least partly, on a strict keeping of the law. Others seemed to have felt that the Christian life was supposed to be completely free of all laws and constraints. The apostle Paul handled the issue of the law and what Jesus’ death meant in many of his letters to Christians encountering erroneous ideas regarding the law. Paul used the marriage metaphor to explain the role of the law. Perhaps the following modern incident can help us get a better perspective on the issue.


Investigations began into this accident that was so costly in human life and environmental damage. Sorrow turned to anger when it became clear that alarm systems on the rig had been disabled and that key safety mechanisms also had been consciously switched off.

The law has always served as God’s alarm system, warning of the danger of the sin problem in our lives.

**Discuss:** What similarities are there between this example and the prominent Christian theology that states that the death of Jesus frees us from the law?
**Opening Activity:** The following activity can help make this lesson more personal. Ask class members to come up with a working definition of sin without making reference to the Ten Commandments or any other laws. The objective of this exercise is not to get a good definition but to experience the difficulty of defining sin without the law.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**I. The Results of Sin** *(Review the Fall as recorded in Genesis 3 with your class.)*

Sin is painful and costly and life threatening. When Eve and Adam decided to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *(Gen. 3:6)*, they set loose a virus that penetrated everything and everyone created on this planet. Death entered the world, and face-to-face intimacy with the Creator became impossible. By trusting Satan’s cunning insinuations rather than God’s word, the first human couple also destroyed the loving relationship with their Creator. They became afraid and tried to hide away *(vss. 7, 8)*. Yet, God called out to them and kept calling “Where art thou?” *(vs. 9)*. In their first conversation with the Creator following the eating of the fruit, Adam and Eve pointed fingers—at each other, at the serpent, and, ultimately, at God (“‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate’” *(vs. 12, NASB; italics added)*).

It is in this context that we hear for the first time the sweet (while still veiled) sound of the gospel as God pronounces judgment on the serpent—and the archenemy behind the serpent. “‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel’” *(vs. 15, NASB)*.

Following this pronouncement, Genesis 3:21 tells us in an abbreviated form that God did something for Adam and Eve. He made garments of skin and clothed them. Most Bible commentators see this as the first reference to sacrifice. An innocent animal had to die to provide covering and shelter for the first human couple. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew terms denoting “garments” and the verbal form of “to clothe” ring of tabernacle and worship and are used to describe the clothing of priests and high priests *(compare Exod. 28:4; 29:5, 8 for “garment,” and Exod. 29:8; 40:14; Lev. 8:13 for “to clothe”)*. The next chapter underlines the importance of sacrifice even more as it tells a story about appropriate and inappropriate offerings. Since sin demanded a sacrifice *(Rom. 6:23)*, God instituted the sacrificial service as a powerful illustration of both the cost and the importance of sacrifice. But it wasn’t the real thing.
Consider This: Which law declares that death is the result of sin? Why is a sacrifice needed to overcome the abyss between God and humanity? Think of a Bible story or reference on which to base your answer.

II. The Cost of Redemption (Review Romans 6:11–18 with your class.)

We may wonder why sin resulted in death and why redemption requires death, as well. Genesis 2:16, 17 records the first divine commandment given to Adam, expressed both in positive and in negative terms. The command “‘Of every tree... you may freely eat’” affirms the goodness and benevolence of the Creator. “‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen. 2:17, NKJV). The verses exhibit a clear legal structure. Action is prescribed, and limits are set. Furthermore, potential consequences (“‘you shall surely die’”) are indicated. This divine law had at its center the issue of obedience and trust. Unfortunately, our first parents did not obey and failed to trust. Did they die? No, and yes. God’s intervention and continued love gave hope and added many years. However, their death was certain. They began to die the moment they ate from the fruit. They began to age; they saw leaves falling from trees; they witnessed the first human murder in their family.

With the introduction of the sacrificial service (following the Fall), God illustrated both the bloody nature of sin and the high price of salvation. Substitution was the key to salvation: the innocent traded places with the guilty. Scripture is full of references to this great reversal (compare Mark 10:45, 1 Cor. 6:20, Rom. 6:11–18). In fact, Jesus on the cross, dying as the innocent Sacrifice for the world, was part of God’s plan to address the sin problem and amazed angels and the universe (John 3:16). God Himself paid the ransom. The Lawgiver gave His life for the sinners who, through their sins, had caused His death. Only One equal with the law could atone for its transgression. The Cross depicts the nature of the Lawgiver most clearly. He did not temporarily suspend the law. He fulfilled the law, including the Sabbath law (Matt. 5:17).

Consider This: Some Christians (and, perhaps, also some Seventh-day Adventists) have moved away from understanding the Cross as part of the propitiation and payment for sin. They emphasize the notion that the Cross, first and foremost, demonstrates the character of God. Discuss this concept in light of the sanctuary and its sacrificial service.
STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. How does Paul use a marriage relationship to help explain our relationship to the law (Rom. 7:1–6)?

2. Why do so many Christians claim that Jesus’ death on the cross did away with the law?

3. How can the law function as an agent of sin and death and yet not be sinful itself (Rom. 8:1, 2)?

4. In most countries, the law assumes a person’s innocence until proven guilty. Are we presumed innocent or guilty in God’s sight? Why?

Application Questions:

1. How can I know what actions are acceptable or unacceptable to God?

2. The law is supposed to convict me of sin and turn me to Jesus. What should I do if I still feel guilty, even after accepting Jesus into my life?

3. When the law confronts sinners with their sinfulness, what options are open to them?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: Imagine with your class the following scenario: your neighbor is a devout Buddhist and places great emphasis on harmony, good deeds, and care of creation. He finds the Christian focus upon blood and sacrifice revolting. He wants to know how Christianity can teach peace when it focuses upon such violence. As a class, come up with some suggestions that will help your neighbor better understand the essence of Christianity.
A well-known magazine ran a full-page ad with a headline that read: “Achieve Immortality! (we’re not kidding).”

In a sense they were kidding, because the ad went on to say, “To find out how you can leave a charitable legacy that will make gifts in your name forever, contact us for our free booklet.”

Writers, scholars, philosophers, and theologians through the millennia have all wrestled with the question of death and what death does to the meaning of our lives. Hence, the ad was a clever, if ultimately unsuccessful, way to help people deal with their mortality.

In contrast, all throughout the New Testament we have been shown the only way to achieve immortality, and that is through faith in Jesus as opposed to the keeping of the law—even though we are to keep it. Indeed, obeying the law is not in conflict with grace; on the contrary, it’s what we’re supposed to do as a result of receiving grace.

This week we continue exploring law and grace.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 17.*
Where Sin Abounded (Rom. 5:12–21)

Though it points out sins, the law is powerless to save us from them. That very powerlessness, however, shows us our need for Jesus, the only solution for sin.

Read Romans 5:12–21. In what way is the message of God’s grace revealed in these texts?

Notice in this passage the constant association between sin and death. Time and again they appear in immediate relationship with each other. And that’s because sin, the violation of God’s law, leads to death.

Now read Romans 5:20. When the law “entered,” sin abounded, in the sense that the law clearly defined what sin was. However, instead of bringing in the natural result of sin, which is death, Paul says this: “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (NKJV). In other words, no matter how bad sin is, God’s grace is sufficient to cover it for those who claim His promises by faith.

Influenced by the translation of 1 John 3:4 in the King James Version (“sin is the transgression of the law”), many restrict sin to the violation of the Ten Commandments alone. However, a more literal translation is “sin is lawlessness” (NKJV) (anomia). Anything that goes against the principles of God is sin. Hence, although the Ten Commandments had not yet been formally revealed when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he violated a command of God (Gen. 2:17) and was consequently guilty of sin. Indeed, it is through the sin of Adam that the curse of death has affected all generations of humanity (Rom. 5:12, 17, 21).

In contrast to Adam’s unfaithfulness, Jesus’ loyalty to God’s law resulted in the hope of eternal life. Although tempted, Jesus never yielded to sin (Heb. 4:15). Here in Romans, Paul extols Jesus’ righteous obedience, which has resulted in eternal life (Rom. 5:18–21) for those who accept it. As the Second Adam, Jesus kept the law fully and broke the curse of death. His righteousness can now become that of the believer’s. A person condemned to death by inheriting the sin of the first Adam can now embrace the gift of life by accepting the righteousness of the Second Adam, Jesus.
Law and Grace (Rom. 6:15–23)

One of the most difficult concepts for Christians to comprehend is the continued role of the law for the one saved by grace. If a believer attains righteousness by accepting the sufficiency of the life and death of Jesus, why is it still necessary to keep the law? This question provides another opportunity to repeat a key point: the law was never intended to provide salvation; its function (after the Fall) was to define sin. Yet, the Cross doesn’t negate the need for a person to follow God’s law any more than someone having been pardoned for violating the speed limit can now continue to violate it.

According to Romans 6:12, 15–23, what are the implications for living a life of grace? See especially Rom. 6:12, 15, 17.

Grace and the law are not contraries; they do not negate each other. Instead, they are powerfully connected. The law, because it can’t save us, shows us why we need grace. Grace is not opposed to law but to death. Our problem was not the law itself but the eternal death that resulted from violating it.

Paul warns the Christian to be careful about using the promised gift of grace as an excuse to sin (Rom. 6:12, 15). Because sin is defined through the law, when Paul tells Christians not to sin, He is basically telling them: keep the law, obey the commandments!

“Paul had ever exalted the divine law. He had shown that in the law there is no power to save men from the penalty of disobedience. Wrongdoers must repent of their sins and humble themselves before God, whose just wrath they have incurred by breaking His law, and they must also exercise faith in the blood of Christ as their only means of pardon.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 393.

Why is it so easy to get caught up in the faulty logic that says that because we are not saved by the law, we no longer have to obey it?
O Wretched Man! (Rom. 7:21–25)

Read Romans 7:13–25. How are we to understand these verses? Is Paul talking about an unconverted man, or is this the experience of the converted? What reasons can you give for your answer?

If you were unsure as to whom these verses refer, you are not alone. Theologians also have wrestled with this question for centuries. The person described here is someone who delights in the law of God (hardly sounds like a nonbeliever) yet who seems to be enslaved to sin (which makes no sense because Christians are promised power over sin). The SDA Bible Commentary, after looking at the arguments from both sides, says: “Paul’s main purpose in the passage seems to be to show the relationship that exists between the law, the gospel, and the person who has been awakened to earnest struggles against sin in preparation for salvation. Paul’s message is that, although the law may serve to precipitate and intensify the struggle, only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring victory and relief.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 554.

No matter how we look at these verses, we must always remember that the person who struggles with sin is still capable of making right choices. If this were not the case, all the Pauline (as well as other) promises about power over sin would be meaningless. Also, as Matthew 5 demonstrates, sin often starts before an act is committed. Consequently, a person is in violation of the law simply by thinking something sinful. Ordinarily, this reality could be a source of frustration. However, in the context of Romans 7, the individual may be helpless, but he is not hopeless. For the person who lives in the Spirit, the ever-present law serves as a constant reminder that deliverance from condemnation comes through Jesus (Rom. 7:24–8:2).

Read again the verses for today. In what ways do they parallel your own experience with the Lord? Despite your struggles, how can you experience the hope that Paul nevertheless expressed there?
The Goal of the Law (Rom. 9:30–10:4)

The title for this week’s lesson comes from Romans 10:4—“Christ is the end of the law” (NKJV). Many who have been preconditioned to think negatively about the law automatically interpret the text to mean, “Christ made the law obsolete.” However, this reading goes against the many references in the book of Romans and other parts of the New Testament that discuss the continued relevance of the law.

Read Romans 9:30–10:4. How is Paul explaining here how salvation is by faith and not by the law?

As with the rest of the epistle to the Romans, Paul’s purpose in these verses is to demonstrate the true source of righteousness. The law is an indicator of righteousness, but it is powerless to make people righteous. Hence, Paul portrays a paradox: the nations (Gentiles) who did not even strive for righteousness have obtained it, while Israel, who strove to keep the righteous law, did not obtain it. Paul is not excluding Jews from righteousness; neither is he saying that every non-Jew is righteous. He is simply saying that the law does not bring righteousness to a sinner, whether Jew or Gentile.

Many Jews were sincere in their desire for righteousness, but their quest was futile (Rom. 10:2). They were zealous about serving God but wanted to do so on their own terms. They had taken an object of God’s revelation (the law) and confused it with the Source of their salvation. As good as the law is, it’s not good enough to save anyone. In fact, rather than making a person righteous, the law highlights the individual’s sinfulness; it amplifies the need for righteousness. That’s why Paul describes Christ as the “end” of the law. He is not the “end” in the sense of terminating the law, but in the sense of being the “goal” of the law, the One to whom the law points. The law leads a person to Christ as the repentant sinner looks to Him for salvation. The law reminds all Christians that Christ is our righteousness (Rom. 10:4).

People who take the law seriously are always in danger of legalism, of seeking to establish “their own righteousness.” As we seek to obey God’s law, how can we be careful not to fall into what can be a very subtle trap?
The Disciplinarian (Gal. 3:19–24)

In harmony with the book of Romans, Paul is careful to stipulate in Galatians that the purpose of the law is to define sin and not to make people righteous (Gal. 3:19, 21).

Read Galatians 3:23, 24. What images does Paul use to describe the purpose of the law? What do you think the images mean?

Depending on the translation, the law is identified in verse 24 as a “schoolmaster,” “taskmaster,” “tutor,” and “custodian,” among other designations. The Greek term refers to a slave employed by a wealthy individual to be a disciplinarian for his son. It was the tutor’s responsibility to ensure that the son learned self-discipline. Although a slave, the tutor was given the authority to do that which was necessary to keep the son in line, even if it meant physical punishment. When the son reached adulthood, the tutor no longer had authority over him.

In light of the explanation of the role of the tutor, what do you think is the purpose of the law for someone who has received salvation in Christ?

Although the tutor no longer had authority over the adult son, it was expected that the lessons that the son had learned would enable him to make mature decisions. Similarly, while the Christian is not under the condemning power of the law, as a person who has attained maturity, he or she is expected to govern his or her actions in accordance with the principles of the law.

In addition to its role as tutor, the law also operated as a caretaker that protected the believer until “the faith” came (Gal. 3:23). Here again we see that Christ is the “end,” the goal, of the law. Paul makes that point explicitly when he says that the law brought us to Christ, so that “we might be justified by faith” (vs. 24).

Read carefully Galatians 3:21. What does it say that should forever end any idea that we can be saved by obedience to the law? Why is this such good news? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
Further Study: “The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

“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.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 234, 235.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, talk about the wonderful hope found in Galatians 3:21. How is the gospel of grace so clearly presented there? Why should this text be the absolute antidote to legalism?

2. Godly living is not optional for those who call themselves children of God. Many well-meaning individuals stress the need for us to attain “perfection” if we desire to enter the kingdom. Unfortunately, those who embrace this doctrine not only promote self-sufficiency as a key to salvation, but they also ignore the reality of sinful human nature. Humans have to live with inherited tendencies toward sin and are constantly bombarded with temptation. Even more troubling is the discouragement that can come to those who are constantly looking to themselves and how well they are doing as a barometer of their salvation. Compared to the holiness of God and His law, who among us can ever measure up? How, then, can we be careful that while seeking to live godly, faithful lives, we do not get caught up in any theology that puts the hope of our salvation in anything other than the righteousness of Christ covering us?

3. What is the goal of the law?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 10:4

**The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the relationship between the law and grace.
Feel: Be convicted of a personal need for Jesus.
Do: Seek to live a godly, faithful life while not falling into legalism.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Law Leads Us to Christ.

A In Romans 5, why does Paul closely associate sin and death?
B How did the first Adam’s relationship to the law bring death, while the Second Adam’s relationship to the law brings life?
C How can the law serve as a reminder to all Christians that Christ is our righteousness?

II. Feel: Jesus Is Our Only Hope of Heaven.

A After coming into contact with God’s law, why should I be more conscious of my faults and shortcomings?
B Do you feel that God’s law is more like a bodyguard or a police officer? Why?

III. Do: Being Godly Through Grace

A If I am struggling to do the things I know I should do, does this mean that I am not converted? Explain.
B Why can I never be good enough to merit heaven through keeping the law?

**Summary:** Obeying the law is not in conflict with grace. It’s what we do as a result of receiving grace.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** Romans 10:4

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The law points out our sin and awakens in us the need for a Savior.

**Just for Teachers:** Ever since Paul’s day, there have been questions regarding the relationship of law and grace. A superficial reading of some of Paul’s writings has led some to suggest that obeying the law is in conflict with receiving grace. But a closer reading of these texts shows us that, though Paul strongly opposed those who were trying to earn their salvation by strict adherence to the law, obedience does play a central part in the Christian life. The law convicts us of sin and then points us to Jesus. After conversion, we live our lives according to the law as a result of receiving grace.

Almost everywhere Paul went and established a Christian church, he seemed to have been followed by a group that was intent on undoing his message of salvation through Jesus Christ. This group insisted on a strict keeping of the law as the true way to be saved. Paul reacted strongly to this group and often returned to the roles of the law and grace, using different examples from the world in which his hearers lived. This week, we explore some of his key writings on this topic.

On October 15, 1492, a group of indigenous people offered Christopher Columbus dried tobacco leaves as a gift. Soon after, sailors began to bring tobacco back to Europe, and the plant was grown all over the continent. One of the main reasons for tobacco’s growing popularity in Europe was its supposed healing properties. Europeans believed that tobacco could cure almost anything, from bad breath to cancer. One Spanish doctor, Nicolás Monardes, wrote a book about the history of medicinal plants of the New World and went so far as to claim that tobacco could cure 36 health problems. At first, tobacco was chewed. Then in 1588, a man named Thomas Harriott promoted smoking tobacco as a way to get one’s daily dose of tobacco. Even though he died of nose cancer (smokers would breathe the smoke out through the nose), people remained firm in their belief of the benefits of tobacco.

During World War II (1939–1945), cigarettes were included in a soldier’s rations and were considered as essential as food. During the 1950s, more and more evidence surfaced suggesting that smoking was linked to lung cancer. Finally, laws for regulating the industry’s advertising were

**Opening Activity:** As a class, look at the above brief history of smoking and consider the following: were people dying of tobacco-related diseases before there were laws about it? Can legislation about smoking save lives? Can legislation help people who are addicted to nicotine?

**Discuss:** Are those who are unaware of God’s law suffering the consequences of breaking His law? If so, how? How would an awareness of God’s law help people?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. **Salvation Beyond the Cross** (*Review briefly Leviticus 16 with your class.*)

For many Christians, salvation through faith in Christ is centered upon the Cross. The logic goes like this: Jesus came voluntarily to offer Himself as atonement for the sins of humanity; He suffered and died on the cross for all of us and was then resurrected; and, after having spent some final moments with His disciples, He ascended to heaven. End of story. The Cross has become the focal point of salvation, and it should be. However, the biblical text does not stop here. Salvation is not just about the Cross (and our individual responses to the Cross) where all the sins of the world were atoned for; it is also about the problem of sin, per se. The Old Testament sacrificial system actually provides a helpful clue for that. When a sinner recognized sin in his life, he would bring the appropriate offering to the tabernacle (or, later, the temple). He would lay hands upon the head of the substitutionary animal before its slaughter. The blood of the animal would be collected and smeared around the altar and sprinkled against the curtain of the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary. The remains of the animal (or parts thereof) would be burned. This was, however, not the end of the story. Due to the transfer of sin, the sanctuary required cleansing, and God’s law demanded that this happen symbolically once a year during the Day of Atonement ritual (*Leviticus 16*). Leviticus 16:16 describes the purpose of the sacrifices and blood manipulation during that day: “‘He [the high priest] shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel...
and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities’ ” (NASB). Finally, the sin of the entire congregation would be transferred upon the goat, who would be led into the wilderness so that the sanctuary would be cleansed from all the sins that had accumulated during the year (Lev. 16:21, 22; compare vs. 30).

**Consider This:** The complex sacrificial system was based upon divine laws. Why would God want the children of Israel to experience the Day of Atonement ritual if they had already offered a sacrifice for their sins? What was the meaning of all this action?

II. The True “Lamb of God” *(Review the implications of Jesus’ title as the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29 with your class.)*

The New Testament writers clearly understood that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” who would carry the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6). Following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, they understood the implications of Jesus’ sacrifice. The author of Hebrews is fully aware of the link between Jesus’ death and heavenly ministry and the larger sacrificial law of the Old Testament. Hebrews 9:15 talks about Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross that covered all transgressions. Some verses later, its author describes Jesus’ entry into the heavenly sanctuary (in other words, the original, not the earthly pattern as noted in Exodus 25:9) and His ministry there (Heb. 9:24–26) that will result in the final putting away of sin. Following that task Jesus will return in order to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him (Heb. 9:27, 28).

**Consider This:** What are the implications of Jesus’ title as the “Lamb of God”?

III. Lessons From the Heavenly Sanctuary *(Review Daniel 8:14 with your class.)*

The Cross is only one stop along the way in the plan of salvation. To be sure, it is the pivotal point of history, but salvation requires further work related to the heavenly sanctuary and the final elimination of sin. If Christ’s death had effected the abolition of the law, why would Hebrews highlight the important work of Jesus as heavenly High Priest?

It seems to be clear that, for the biblical writer, the Cross and the heavenly sanctuary were not mutually opposing realities but rather elements of the same divine plan of salvation that had been replicated on a small scale in the earthly sanctuary and its services. This important reality had already been foretold in the prophetic writings of Daniel, particularly in Daniel 8, which, in the context of successive world powers, describes a little-horn power that
would attack the sanctuary and its sacrificial service (Dan. 8:9–11) and would seek to change times and laws (Dan. 7:25). The question of how long God’s people would have to endure this godless power is answered in Daniel 8:14: “And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days [literal mornings and evenings]; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed’ ” (NKJV). This end-time judgment scene (compare also Daniel 7) links the Day of Atonement to the ultimate solution of the sin problem. The law describing this sequence cannot be the problem. Rather, the problem lies in our imperfect understanding of the divine law that underlies the plan of salvation and showcases the character of the Lawgiver. He recognizes sin for what it is: destructive, demeaning, egocentric behaviors, and attitudes that separate us from the Creator and Source of life.

Consider This: Why is the heavenly sanctuary so important in the theology and message of the Epistle to the Hebrews? What does the heavenly sanctuary teach us about the plan of salvation and the nature of sin?

➤STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. In what way is Christ the “goal” of the law (Rom. 10:4)?
2. What definition of sin do you prefer: “sin is the transgression of the law” or “sin is lawlessness”? What would the difference be?
3. Why is it so difficult for Christians to comprehend the continued role of the law for someone saved by grace?

Application Questions:

1. How can we avoid confusing the law with the Source of our salvation?
2. How can we look at the Ten Commandments not as a list of prohibitions but as a sign of God’s love?
3. How will I know if I am becoming legalistic?

➤STEP 4—Create

Activity: Imagine that you are a lifeguard at a large public pool. You notice a small boy jump off the high-diving board in the deep end and start drowning. You jump in to rescue and resuscitate him. The next day he is back on the diving board and jumps in again. After you rescue him again, he says, “I know that you will rescue me; so, I don’t have to obey the rule that says only swimmers can jump off the diving board.” What would you say to him? How would your answers also apply to the requirement of keeping the law after we have been saved?
The Law of God and the Law of Christ

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 19:16–22; John 13:34, 35; Gal. 6:1–5; Acts 17:31; John 5:30.

Memory Text: “‘If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love’” (John 15:10, NKJV).

In most nations a hierarchy of laws exists. At the top are laws that come from the national government and that bind all who reside in the country. Then there are laws on the provincial level that pertain to the inhabitants of certain territories. Finally, local laws govern the smallest districts. Although each division within a country is permitted to make laws that are relevant to its constituents, none can make a law that contradicts the law of the nation. And though circumstances may dictate that a certain law be applied in different ways, the application cannot deviate from the spirit of the law.

As the Supreme Head of the universe, the Creator God has established laws for all of His creatures. When Jesus Christ voluntarily transformed Himself into human flesh, He gave Himself to a life of obedience to His Father (Phil. 2:5–11) and to His commandments. Thus, everything that Jesus taught, the perspective that He put on the law, even the “new” commandment that He gave, was always in full harmony with the law of God.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 24.
The Law and the Prophets

Some believe that the Ten Commandments, delivered through Moses at Sinai, were relevant only to the Israelites before the Cross and are not binding in the New Covenant era of grace. Others teach that Christians are free from the old law, but only those of Jewish heritage, and not Christians, are still expected to adhere to it. As we have seen, though the Bible does teach that the works of the law can save no one, no passage gives a person license to violate God’s law. If any did, it would be a license to sin, and the Bible would blatantly contradict itself on a crucial topic.

In this context we remember that God revealed the terms of His covenant to Israel on tablets of stone that contained the law. However, the Bible contains many other commandments that cover details not found in the Decalogue. In seeking a comprehensive understanding of God’s will, the rabbis counted 613 scriptural laws, which they anchored in the Ten Commandments. Jesus appears to go beyond the rabbis when He announces that He has not come to “abolish the law or the prophets” (Matt. 5:17, NRSV; emphasis supplied). While summarized in the Ten Commandments, the law of God contains every divine command spoken directly to or through His prophets.

Compare Matthew 19:16–22 and 22:34–40. What do these verses tell us about Jesus and the Ten Commandments?

Although there are hundreds of commandments that God has revealed in His Word, the Ten Commandments provide solid principles that can be applied to all other laws. Hence, Jesus mentioned five of the Ten Commandments when speaking to the rich young ruler. There is an even more potent summary of God’s law in the commandments found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, which is to love God and to love one’s neighbor. Jesus declares, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:40, NKJV). Ultimately, Jesus and His Father are united in purpose as they urge the people of God’s creation to love as they have been loved, and obedience to the law is foundational to how that love is to be expressed.

What in your life shows your love for God and for your neighbor?
The “Rules” of Love *(John 15:10)*

Scripture provides a number of examples of Jesus’ fidelity to the law of God. For instance, although His words in Luke 2:49 imply that at a young age He understood His identity, when His earthly mother expressed the hurt she felt that resulted from His straying from the family, He humbly accompanied His parents home and “was obedient to them” *(Luke 2:51, NIV)*. On another occasion, Jesus refused to bow to Satan when tempted in the wilderness because worship was reserved for God alone *(Luke 4:8)*. And there are several illustrations of His Sabbath keeping *(for example, Luke 4:16)*. Paul wrote that Jesus’ entire life was based on obedience to God’s will *(Phil. 2:5–11)*, and Hebrews says that, although tempted, He never sinned *(Heb. 4:15)*. Thus, He could say as He approached His final hours, “I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love’” *(John 15:10, NKJV)*.

**Read** John 13:34, 35. What did Jesus mean by saying that this was a “new” commandment?

Jesus understood that there is a relationship between commandment keeping and love. Though we’re not used to talking about “rules” of love, one could say that, in a real sense, the Ten Commandments are those rules. They show us how God wants us to express our love for Him and others.

God is love *(1 John 4:16)*, and so in presenting His commandment to His disciples *(John 13:34, 35)*, Jesus is simply amplifying the law of love that originated in His Father *(John 3:16)*. Now, though, more than just loving each other as ourselves, we are to love as Jesus 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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 547.

**With today’s study in mind, read** 1 John 3:16. How can we have this kind of love in our own lives? How can we die the kind of death to self that is needed in order for us to express such love?
Take a close look at the references to law in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. What is Paul saying here? Why such a strong emphasis on law?

God’s desire is that all people accept His gift of eternal life and become citizens of His everlasting kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul reveals his method of attracting people to God’s kingdom. He understands that there are cultural barriers that hinder people from making a decision for the gospel. Paul is willing to adapt to the culture of the group to whom he was witnessing for the sole purpose of seeing them saved.

Ultimately, all who become a part of God’s kingdom will be subject to His law. Consequently, those who minister for God must also be in line with God’s will. Paul is quick to state that although he uses innovative methods to reach people, he is always careful to remain under the dictates of God’s law. His desire to see people saved will not allow him to compromise the laws of the God he is asking them to serve. He may adapt to cultural laws, but only if there is no conflict with the ultimate law. The principle that governs his method is the “law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21, NASB).

We can also understand Paul’s reference to the “law of Christ” as the method that Christ used. It was a method based on love for all people and not for just a select few. Paul does not intend for the law of Christ to be seen as an alternative to the law of God. The two work harmoniously together as the loving law of Christ is used to introduce those saved by grace to the law of a loving God. In fact, the entire section, in which Paul so openly explains all that He is willing to do in order to reach the lost, is a perfect example of the kind of self-sacrificing love that is revealed in the “law of Christ.”

How much self are you willing to deny in order to reach others for Christ? How much self have you already denied in reaching out to others? How much of the “law of Christ” do you follow?
Fulfilling the Law of Christ (*Gal. 6:2*)

Whether revealed in written documents or in nature, the law of God discloses His will to every person capable of understanding (*Rom. 1:20, 2:12–16*). Consequently, no one can claim to be ignorant of the basic requirements of God. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23, NKJV*) and thus are destined for destruction (*Rom. 6:23, Ezek. 18:4*). However, all is not lost: the curse has been reversed by the gift of eternal life, which has been made available through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*Eph. 2:8*).

According to Paul, grace should empower the believer to live an obedient life (*Rom. 6:15, Eph. 2:10, Titus 2:11–14*), though, as we all know too well, we don’t always live as obediently and faithfully as we should.

**According** to Galatians 6:1–5, what is one way to manifest the “law of Christ”?

It is important to remember that everyone is subject to temptation and can submit to sin in moments of weakness. With this recognition, it is insensitive for a person to immediately condemn a fellow Christian who has fallen. Even Jesus, who had never sinned, was willing to assist those who have been overcome by sin. As Ellen G. White wrote of Jesus, “He did not censure human weakness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

Paul admonished Christians to provide assistance for the purpose of restoration (*Gal. 6:1*). In other words, the person who has sinned should be encouraged to abide once again by the precepts of God’s law.

The law of Christ is driven by mercy. Had it not been for His sacrificial death, there would be no reason to keep the law of God. However, because Christ has made eternal life possible, there is an incentive for the faithful to resume keeping God’s law after moments of weakness. Fellow believers should use the law of Christ as a vehicle to transport the repentant sinner back to the arena of God’s law of love.

Think about a time when you messed up and were shown grace, though you didn’t deserve it (after all, if you did deserve it, it wouldn’t be grace). How can you make sure that you remember the grace that you have received the next time that someone needs to beg some grace from you?
Law and Judgment *(John 5:30)*

Although God’s law is a law of mercy, God will eventually use it as the standard of judgment. God has continued to provide opportunities for sinners to repent and pledge loyalty to Him, but the hour is coming when the cry will go out, “‘Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy’” *(Rev. 22:11, NRSV)*. This announcement serves as a prelude to the final judgment.

*In Revelation 14:7, the first angel proclaims God’s judgment, though a number of other texts speak of Christ’s judgment (for example, Acts 17:31, 2 Tim. 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:10).* **How does John 5:30 help us understand the role of Jesus in judgment?**

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Although Christ had laid aside His divine nature when He became human *(Phil. 2:5–11)*, He still had a special relationship with the Father. When the religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy, He informed His accusers that God had given Him authority to fulfill specific divine tasks *(John 5:19–30)*, one of which was judgment. 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. Given His familiarity with the human experience, Christ would not condemn a person unjustly. In fact, Christ suggests that condemnation does not come from Him, but that the unrepentant sinner condemns himself when he refuses to heed the command of God *(John 12:48)*.

Many are familiar with the content of God’s law but don’t know how to keep it. The law is not a checklist we use to see how close we are to the kingdom; instead, it is an instrument that expresses various principles of love. Fulfilling the law does not mean that we obey it to gain personal favor with God, but it beckons each Christian to share the love of God with those who need it. As the standard of judgment, the law serves to measure the level of love that the individual has shared with God and humanity. When Christ presides over the final judgment, He will use God’s unchanging law of love as the standard by which to judge *(James 2:12)*.

“ ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.’ Here, again, our duty is plainly set before us. How can the professed followers of Christ so lightly regard these inspired injunctions? . . .

“We know but little of our own hearts, and have but little sense of our own need of the mercy of God. This is why we cherish so little of that sweet compassion which Jesus manifests toward us, and which we should manifest toward one another. We should remember that our brethren are weak, erring mortals, like ourselves. Suppose that a brother has through unwatchfulness been over-borne by temptation, and contrary to his general conduct has committed some error; what course shall be pursued toward him? We learn from Bible history that men whom God had used to do a great and good work committed grave sins. The Lord did not pass these by unrebuked, neither did he cast off his servants. When they repented, he graciously forgave them, and revealed to them his presence, and wrought through them. Let poor, weak mortals consider how great is their own need of pity and forbearance from God and from their brethren. Let them beware how they judge and condemn others.”—Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, January 25, 1883.

Discussion Questions:

1. Reflect on the above two paragraphs from Signs of the Times. Why is it so important that we bestow grace on those who fall into sin?

2. Think about some well-known Bible characters who fell into sin, whom God was yet able to forgive and continue to use. What important lesson is there for us in these examples?

3. In what ways can we enforce church discipline while at the same time showing grace and mercy toward those among us who fall into sin? Why should we see the two concepts, discipline and grace, as not being in contradiction with each other?
The Lesson in Brief

►Key Text: John 15:10

►The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that God’s law in its entirety is based on the principle of love.
Feel: Be assured in the knowledge that Jesus is both our Savior and Judge.
Do: Demonstrate love to God and others in all of life’s dealings.

►Learning Outline:

I. Know: Law and Grace Are Two Sides of the Same Coin.
   A Jesus kept His Father’s law and remained in His love (John 15:10). Do I have to keep God’s law to remain in His love?
   B For whom are the Ten Commandments applicable?
   C How can the law serve to measure the level of love that an individual has shared with God and humans?
   D How is Jesus’ “new” commandment (John 13:34) a revalidation of an old commandment (Lev. 19:34)? How is it new?

II. Feel: The Judge Is Our Friend.
   A What are the “rules” of love?
   B How do you feel about Jesus being your Judge (John 5:22)?

III. Do: Love Must Be Demonstrated.
   A In what two guiding principles of action did Jesus summarize the Ten Commandments?
   B Why is loving others as Jesus loved us more than just loving each other as we love ourselves (John 13:34)?
   C How can we find practical ways of showing our love for God and others in our church family, community, and personal relationships?
   D How can we enforce church discipline while showing grace and mercy?

►Summary: Everything that Jesus taught, including the “new” commandment that He gave, was in full harmony with the law of God.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: John 15:10

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God’s law is the unchanging law of love that has always been and will always be the divine standard for judgment.

Just for Teachers: The idea that the Ten Commandments were given only to the Jews and are no longer necessary in the Christian era is a popular but unbiblical theological position. Some say that Christians are not bound to the Ten Commandments but only to Jesus’ “new commandment” of loving one another. This week’s study highlights the fact that the Ten Commandments were given by Christ (as part of the Trinity) on Sinai and that they form the standard by which we can measure love to God and one another.

A little boy once came home with a gift for his mother. He loved her very much and wanted to give her something special. He had left very early in the morning and spent the whole day looking for it. And now he had found it. He came home and proudly presented his mother with—a big green frog! The mother screamed, and then, realizing that this was a gift of love, hugged her son. The boy had great intentions, but as he matures, he is going to have to learn to express his love in actions and words that others will understand. He will have to learn to speak their love language.

Gary Chapman, the author of several books on the five love languages, writes, “Love is not a solo experience. Love requires both a lover and a responder. If God is the divine lover, why do not all of His creatures feel His love? Perhaps because some are looking in the wrong direction.” —The Love Languages of God (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2002), p. 13.

Part of the problem is that we often define love as just a wonderful feeling. Feelings never can form the basis for a loving relationship. The relationship must be built on choices that show themselves in action. God’s law is a reflection of who He is and reminds us of the fact that God is love. Jesus came to show God’s love in action. Jesus showed the validity of God’s eternal law by living it out and reinforcing it in His teachings.

Opening Activity: (If the class is large, you may want to divide it into smaller groups to give each member a chance to give an answer.) What is your love language? What would you most like as an expression of love: a gift, words of encouragement, some quality time, practical help, or physical touch? How can you experience God’s love for you in your love language?
Discuss: If God is love and His character is expressed in His law, then what is God’s love language? How can we learn to speak His love language?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Greatest Command (Review Matthew 22:35–40 and Deuteronomy 6:5 with your class.)

Throughout His life, Jesus consistently validated the Ten Commandments. When one of the religious experts asks Him to name the greatest commandment of the law, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the Shema pronouncement offered by every Jew when he or she would read Scripture and worship the Lord (Matt. 22:35–40). Jesus knew that this was a trick question meant to “test” the upstart Rabbi and, in the minds of the religious leadership of the time, would hopefully provide a quote or statement that could be used against Him. “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’” is a great reminder of our all-encompassing allegiance to the Creator who made us and redeemed us—and is worthy of our adoration (Luke 10:27, NKJV).

Consider This: What does the reference to heart, soul, and mind tell us about human nature?

II. Old Testament Roots (Review Matthew 22:39 and Leviticus 19:18 with your class.)

Jesus also quotes another text from the Old Testament that comes second but needs to be set on par with the one already quoted, at least according to Jesus (Matt. 22:39): “‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord’” (Lev. 19:18, NASB; italics added). Both quotes from the Pentateuch summarize the essence and foundation of the Ten Commandments without setting one commandment over or against another. While the first four commandments emphasize our commitment and relationship to God (in other words, a vertical dimension), the last six highlight the principles of horizontal relations, or how we deal and live in a divinely ordained manner with the people around us.

It is intriguing to note that Jesus’ quote from Leviticus 19 really emphasizes the entire law, a fact that would not have been lost on the rabbis and scribes. As noted by many scholars and Bible students, Leviticus 19 describes holy living and divinely ordained ethics, and it does so by mixing all three categories of biblical law: moral, civil, and ceremonial. The rationale for living a holy life
appears right at the outset of the chapter: “‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’” (vs. 2, NASB). Numerous times, an abbreviated version (“I am the Lord your God”) appears in the chapter. All Ten Commandments are referenced in the chapter, at times repeatedly, as the following table illustrates. (The table is based on Mark F. Rooker, Leitcitus, The New American Commentary, vol. 3A [Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000], p. 252.)

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<td>I am the LORD (vs. 2)</td>
<td>Verses 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30–32, 34, 37</td>
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<td>Graven images (vss. 4–6)</td>
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<td>God’s name in vain (vs. 7)</td>
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<td>Sabbath (vss. 8–11)</td>
<td>Verses 3, 30</td>
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<td>Honor parents (vs. 12)</td>
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<td>Stealing (vs. 15)</td>
<td>Verses 11, 13, 35, 36</td>
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<td>False witness (vs. 16)</td>
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<td>Coveting (vs. 17)</td>
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Leviticus 19 highlights the holistic nature of Old Testament law, integrating all types of law and emphasizing holy living. Jesus’ reference to both vertical and horizontal dimensions of love reaffirms the basic layout of the Ten Commandments.

**Consider This:** Why would Jesus, when asked which law is the greatest, not pick out one particular law? Why does Jesus quote texts that seem to be more foundational than specific?

**III. Jesus’ Interpretation of Law** (Review 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 10:4 with your class.)

While Jesus reaffirmed over and over the divine law, there is also something fresh to His way of expounding Scripture. The Sermon on the Mount contains many examples of these fresh explanations. In His final antithesis in Matthew 5, Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19:18 and then adds a section that is not found in Scripture (“and hate your enemy” [Matt. 5:43]). Most likely, Jesus is not only referring to a biblical quotation but adding to the positive love command a negative hate addition that may have been prevalent in the theology of His days. Interestingly, a similar concept is known from the writings of the Qumran community that represents the thinking of some Jews living prior to and during the time of Jesus.
In His antithesis, Jesus extends the love command of Leviticus 19:18 to include not only the neighbor. He specifically mentions love for enemies and prayer for those who persecute us. Again, Jesus highlights the attitude that the original law had envisioned and makes the implicit explicit. After all, we all have people around us who may not always “love” us. Does this reflect a major difference between the “Law of God” and the “Law of Christ”? Yes, and no. Christ’s antithesis, besides marking Him as the Lawgiver, provides a new and challenging angle that should bring us to the foot of the cross. Who of us is able to love our enemies or pray for those who torment and persecute us? While this is nearly humanly impossible, we are invited to come to the Savior and be transformed into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The law becomes the tutor and guide that points to the Savior (Rom. 10:4).

**Consider This:** Why would Jesus add “and hate your enemy” in Matthew 5:43? If Jesus and the Father are one (see John 17), why would there be a difference between the laws of God and the laws of Jesus? What does the doctrine of the Trinity contribute toward the answer to this question?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. How would saying that the law was not binding in the New Covenant era of grace be, in effect, giving us a license to sin?
2. How did Paul use the “law [of] Christ” as an outreach tool (1 Cor. 9:21)?
3. Jesus as part of the Trinity was involved in the giving of the law at Sinai; so, the law of Christ is really a revalidation of the law of God with one additional clause. What is significant about this addition (John 13:34)?

**Application Questions:**

1. Why do you need to “‘love the LORD your God’” first, before you love “‘your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27, NKJV)?
2. How can God’s law be the way that love for God and humanity is to be expressed?
3. What is the connection between commandment keeping and love?
4. Can I love others if I feel unloved? How?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** Based on the different types of love languages (words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, physical touch), brainstorm practical ways in which your class can show God’s love in your community.
Lesson 9

May 24–30

Christ, the Law and the Gospel

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 7:7–12; Deut. 30:15–20; Matt. 7:24–27; Acts 10:34, 35; John 15:10; Eph. 2:1.

Memory Text: “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, NKJV).

A century before Christ, Roman poet Lucretius wrote a famous poem “On the Nature of Things” that was lost in history until the Middle Ages. Though often accused of being an atheist, Lucretius didn’t deny in his poem the existence of the gods; he just argued that by virtue of being gods, they would have absolutely no interest in anything human.

In contrast, the Bible argues that there is only one God, and that He’s fervently interested in what happens here. And two manifestations of that passionate interest in humanity are found in His law (which is to guide how we live) and in His grace (His means of saving us even though we have violated that law). Though often seen as contrary to each other, law and grace are inseparably linked. Their methods of operation may be different, but together they reveal that righteousness must triumph over sin. The manifestations of God’s law and His grace provide powerful evidence of His love for humanity and His desire to save us into His eternal kingdom.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 31.
Sin and the Law

Read Romans 7:7–12. What is Paul saying here about the relationship between sin and law? Why would he even ask such a question as, “Is the law sin?” (NKJV)?

Paul so closely relates the law and sin that he asks the rhetorical question, “Is the law sin?” The answer, of course, is that it’s not; on the contrary, at the end of the section he says, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (NKJV). The “therefore” shows the conclusion of his argument: that, far from being sin, the law is indeed holy and good.

What Paul says here is analogous to the relationship between criminal law and crime. Something is criminal only if a law depicts it as such. You might go to jail in one country for doing something that in another country is legal. The reason: one country has a law forbidding that action, the other doesn’t. It is the same action but with two different consequences. What makes the difference? The law.

A crucial point to remember, too, is that just because something is a law doesn’t make it good. In early America, a law required people to return escaped slaves to their masters. It was the law; yet, it was hardly a just one. In the case of God’s law, however, we know that it reflects His loving character. Thus Paul’s words that the law is holy and good; what else could it be, considering who created it?

What significance is there in the commandment that Paul uses in Romans 7:7 to prove his point about the law? Why does he use that one instead of another, such as “Thou shalt not steal”?

Perhaps Paul uses that specific commandment instead of some of the others because it’s not so obvious that it’s wrong. Many people, in and of themselves, might not believe that coveting is wrong. Murder, stealing, yes; one generally doesn’t even need the Ten Commandments to know that. But coveting? So it is a perfect example to make his point that it’s the law that shows us what sin is. Otherwise, he might not have known that coveting was wrong.
The Law and Israel (Deut. 30:15–18)

The giving of the law to Israel was a special act. Just before He gave the law to Moses, God reminded His people that they are “‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (Exod. 19:6, NKJV). Among all nations on the face of the earth, it was to Israel that God specially revealed His law (Rom. 9:4). The law was not intended to be a burden to the people but to be a tool through which the chosen nation would reveal to the masses the moral code that is the foundation of God’s government. Israel was to be a partner with God in the mission of universal evangelism, and God’s law was to be the identifying mark for God’s spokespersons.

According to Deuteronomy 30:15–20, what is the relationship between the law and the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Also, even more crucial, how do these principles apply to us today as well, under the new covenant? See Matt. 7:24–27.

God chose Israel to be His representatives. Israel would be the people through whom the nations of the earth received the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, the blessings were by no means automatic. As a chosen nation, Israel was expected to walk in harmony with the Lord’s will. Moses made it clear that life and prosperity would come to the people only if they observed God’s “commandments, decrees, and ordinances” (Deut. 30:15, 16, NRSV).

Given the numerous stories of rebellion that mar Israel’s history, Israel as a nation failed to live up to the covenant conditions. Yet, we must not forget that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NKJV). No nation on earth has fulfilled the will of God. Even in recent history, nations that profess to be Christian have misrepresented the cause of God with warmongering, prejudice, and oppression.

In your own experience, how are obedience and faith related? That is, when you obey, what happens to your faith in contrast to when you disobey? How does obedience strengthen faith?
The Law and the Nations (Acts 10:34, 35)

Read Acts 10:34, 35; 17:26, 27; Romans 1:20; and 2:14. What is the central teaching of these texts?

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Despite Israel’s mistakes, God did not leave the people in other nations without a witness. Those who were not privileged to receive God’s written revelation received divine messages through the pages of natural revelation (Rom. 1:20). God’s book of nature contains enough information to direct a person to Him.

God has also instilled a measure of spiritual desire in every human being. According to Paul, those who sense God’s indwelling Spirit will engage in a quest to find Him (Acts 17:27). So many people sense an emptiness in their lives that nothing this world offers—fame, power, money, sex—can ultimately fulfill. At its heart, this was the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. This emptiness, this dissatisfaction, often leads people in a quest for something beyond, for something that transcends everyday existence. They are drawn to revealed truth in a desire to quell the longings and emptiness of their souls.

Whether God’s will is revealed through written documents or nature, the person who receives it has the responsibility to live it. Truth is truth, regardless of the vehicle that delivers it, and those who suppress the truth will experience the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18). Consequently, although many people may not have received the Bible or the Ten Commandments, God still holds them accountable for the portions of truth that they have gleaned. Ultimately, everyone will be judged, and the standard of judgment will be law: either the law God expressly revealed through His prophet Moses, or, for those who are ignorant of the written law—the law of conscience, which has been developed by listening to God’s voice in nature.

What great disappointments have you faced that have helped you see just how untrustworthy and unsatisfactory the things of this world really can be? How can you learn from these disappointments about what truly matters?

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Grace and Truth (John 1:17)

John condensed the history of salvation into one verse: “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, NKJV). As a result of Adam’s sin, all humanity has been affected by the curse of death. The curse is intensified by the fact that no one born to human parents, except Jesus, has been free from sinful inclinations. Therefore, God selected a people to whom He revealed His law, intending that those elected would be His light to the other nations. God did not give the law to Israel as a means to salvation but as a constant reminder of their need for righteousness.

What do Philippians 2:8, John 15:10, and Matthew 26:39 tell us about the kind of life that Jesus lived?

When he disobeyed the express command of God, the first Adam plunged the entire world into disarray and bondage. On the other hand, through His obedient life, the Second Adam, Jesus, came to deliver the world from the bondage that the first Adam had brought. When Jesus walked this earth, He voluntarily subjected His own will to the will of His Father and chose not to sin. Unlike the first Adam, who brought condemnation and falsehood into the world, Jesus brought in “grace and truth.” Grace and truth did not supplant the law. Jesus showed, instead, why the law alone was not enough to procure salvation. The truth that He brought was a more complete understanding of grace.

According to Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8, what is the nature of the grace that originates in Jesus? How did Jesus supply grace for humans?

The Greek word translated as “grace” (charis) can also mean “gift” and is related to the term for joy (chara). The gift that Jesus gives to humanity is eternal life. Further, grace manifests itself as the indwelling presence of Christ that enables the individual to participate in the righteousness that the law promotes. Paul states that in condemning sin in the flesh, Jesus has made it possible that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:4, NKJV). Grace not only frees us from the condemnation of the law, but it enables us to keep the law in the way that we are called to do.
The Law and the Gospel (Rom. 1:16, 17)

No matter how “good” our lives are, none can escape the constant reminders of sin. Inevitably, happiness is interrupted by sickness, death, disaster. On a personal level, feelings of spiritual security are often challenged by memories of past sins and, even worse, by the urge to sin again.

In what ways do Romans 6:23, 7:24, and Ephesians 2:1 describe the impact of sin?

A person living in sin, in unrighteousness, is merely a walking corpse just waiting for the day when the last breath exits his body. When Paul assesses the human condition, he cries out in desperation, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24, NKJV). This is a cry for liberation from unrighteousness. Paul quickly realizes that deliverance comes through Jesus (Rom. 7:25).

This is the gospel. The good news is that we who have been trapped in bodies of unrighteousness can be covered with the righteousness of Christ. The gospel is the guarantee that we can escape the condemnation of the law because we now possess the righteousness that the law promotes (Rom. 8:1).

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, the story of Jesus’ death was still being circulated throughout the empire. Those who had heard were fully aware that the way He had died was scandalous. People whose loved ones had been executed on a cross were often left to a life of shame. However, Paul and countless other Christians understood that Christ’s “shameful” death was the most powerful event in human history. That is why Paul declares, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16, author’s translation). And the heart of that gospel is the great promise that in the end, death will not have the final say and that those saved by Jesus will live forever in a new earth.

Many people believe that life is meaningless because it always ends in death. So, nothing we do will matter in the long run. It’s hard to argue with that logic, isn’t it? If everything we have ever done and every person we have ever influenced will all forever be lost and forgotten, what can life mean?

“Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not 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.”—Ellen G. White, Faith and Works, p. 19.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell on the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study. Think through the wonderful and hopeful truths found in these words for even the worst of sinners. How can we learn to claim these promises for ourselves and live as if we really believe them?

2. Although God gave His law to Israel through Moses, the Bible suggests that He uses other methods to reveal His will to people who may not have access to His written revelation (for example, Rom. 1:20; 2:14; Acts 17:26, 27). If God does indeed speak to all people, what is the purpose of missionaries and evangelists?

3. John 1:17 states that “grace and truth” originated with Jesus Christ. Using that text, many people place the law in opposition to “grace and truth.” Why is this a false dichotomy? In what ways do the law and “grace and truth” all work together to reveal to us the character of God as seen in the plan of salvation?

4. Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky created a character who wanted to study why more people didn’t kill themselves. As an atheist, he couldn’t understand why people would want to live meaningless lives that were often so full of pain. Discuss the logic of this thinking.
The Lesson in Brief

►Key Text: Ephesians 2:4, 5

►The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that law and grace work together to reveal God’s plan for triumph over sin.
Feel: Appreciate God’s passionate interest in humanity.
Do: Cooperate with God in becoming involved in sharing the good news with others.

►Learning Outline:

I. Know: Law and Grace Are Inseparably Linked.
   A Ultimately, what standard will be used in the judgment of all humans?
   B Why did God give the law to Israel?
   C What is the “truth” that Jesus demonstrated in His life (John 1:17)?
   D What is our role in the process of salvation? Is there anything we add to it by obeying the law? Explain your answer.
   E When partnering with God in mission to those who have no knowledge of Him, why does God’s law need to be the identifying mark for His spokespersons?

II. Feel: Immanuel—God Is With Us.
   A Why does every human being seem to have a built-in measure of spiritual desire?
   B What are the biggest challenges to spiritual security?
   C What is the good news about the gospel?
   D How does Jesus’ shameful death on the cross free us from shame?

III. Do: Spreading the Good News
   A Besides freeing us from the condemnation of the law, what else does grace do for us?
   B How does Jesus’ death give meaning to our lives now?
   C How does obedience strengthen faith?

►Summary: God’s law, together with His grace, provides powerful evidence of His love for humanity and His desire to save us into His eternal kingdom.
**Learning Cycle**

➤**STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** Ephesians 2:4, 5

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God’s law and His grace show that God is interested and involved in our lives and wants us to extend this good news to others.

Did you know that there is a law in Florida against tying an alligator to a fire hydrant? In almost every country, we can find old laws that are still on the books but now appear very strange or even ridiculous to us. This is probably because they don’t address a real issue in our current culture. At one time, there was obviously a need that led to the establishment of a certain law. In these cases, the law could be seen as outdated but morally neutral.

In other countries, there have been, and sometimes still are, laws that are morally wrong. Most of the time, we can see that laws protect us, our property, and our rights. These laws we view as good.

Many Christians have come to view God’s law as something of the alligator variety, or even worse, as being somehow bad. In the New Testament, Paul very clearly points out that the law is “holy, and just, and good” as it was made by a holy, just, and good God (Rom. 7:12). The law and the gospel are not in opposition but work in harmony to show and lead us to a Savior. This really is the good news that we can joyfully share with others.

**Opening Activity:** The objective of this activity is to emphasize that good news is naturally something we want to share. Ask members of the class, “What is the best news you have ever received? How did it make you feel? Who did you tell?”

**Discuss:** How do laws reflect the character and core concerns of the lawmaker(s)?

➤**STEP 2**—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. Chosen for a Purpose (Review Deuteronomy 7:7, Genesis 12:1–3, Isaiah 42:6, and 49:6 with your class.)

God’s special revelation to Israel was not just God’s way of singling out Israel and marking them as His covenant partner. He did not play favorites. As a matter of fact, God did not choose Israel because they were the largest but
because they were the least significant (Deut. 7:7). God’s purpose with the children of Abraham was to be a blessing and make the God of Israel known (Gen. 12:1–3, Isa. 42:6, 49:6). In other words, mission drove election.

This mission manifested itself in many ways. Israel received God’s special revelation and law that were to showcase God’s grace and lifestyle to the nations with whom Israel came into contact. Exodus 19:4–6 represents an important element of this divine plan of reaching the world. In the context of giving the law at Sinai, God describes Israel as a “‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (Exod. 19:6, NKJV). Notice the inclusiveness of the biblical text. Israel was not only to have priests (or Levites) who would take on a priestly role but also would be a nation of priests. Writes Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Her [Israel’s] role as a nation was a mediatorial role as they related to the nations and people groups around them.”—Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), p. 23. In addition to the mediatorial role of a priest, one should not forget that priests and Levites functioned as teachers in Israel (2 Chron. 17:8, 9; Neh. 8:7, 9, 11; 9:4, 5). This teaching function should also be envisioned when we consider the divine imperative for Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They were to become an object lesson of what life with the Lord would look and feel like. The book of Deuteronomy contains a lengthy section that describes the blessings and curses of the divine covenant with Israel—a covenant that was expressed in legal terms and contained specific conditions (Deuteronomy 28–32). As an example of the envisioned divine blessings for Israel in response to faithful obedience, it is helpful to review a number of verses in Deuteronomy 28. Note the initial statement of purpose in Deuteronomy 28:1: “Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth’” (NASB; italics added). Obedience would result in an exalted place above all nations of the earth, clearly emphasizing the exemplary nature that would (hopefully) lead to further questions about the God of Israel. Deuteronomy 28:10 contains a similar thought: “So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you’” (NASB, italics added).

**Consider This:** Discuss the tension between living as a holy nation and being a priestly people called to serve and teach others. Why and how did Israel struggle with part of the divine plan?

**II. Keeping the Balance** *(Review Micah 4:2 and Isaiah 2:3 with your class.)*

Throughout its history, Israel often struggled to maintain the right balance
between God’s call to be a peculiar people and His desire to bring all nations
to a knowledge of the true God, the One who had made the heaven and the
earth and was about to give Himself as a ransom for lost and wayward humanity. The prophets frequently describe the divine “dream” of having all nations
come to Jerusalem and learn in its temple. Listen to Micah’s description of
this Messianic kingdom: “Many nations will come and say, ‘Come and let us
go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob,
that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For
from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”
(Micah 4:2; nearly verbatim also in Isaiah 2:3, NASB).

It is instructive to see the link between teaching—in other words, mission—and the Source of the divine law. While the prophets foresee the foreign
nations coming to Zion, it is God who will teach His ways and how one
should walk in His paths—two Old Testament metaphors of obedience to the
law. The temple and Jerusalem are described as the places where the divine
law, the key to reaching the nations, is centered.

Consider This: How can we avoid extremes and emphasize balance in our
approaches to mission?

III. The Heart of Mission (Review with your class 2 Kings in the context of the
concept of mission.)

The miraculous healing of the Syrian general Naaman in 2 Kings 5 pro-
vides another important perspective on Israel’s mission. Gentiles were not
only to be drawn by Israel’s blessings and the divine law; they also came
in touch with God’s people and His purpose for the world by direct, divine
intervention.

The youngest missionary in this narrative is a nameless slave girl from
Israel who has been taken during an earlier raid from her home to serve the
household of Naaman. Her compassion for the plight of the master of the
household when he is diagnosed with leprosy, one of the most stigmatized
diseases in the ancient Near East, is her motivation to share with her mis-
tress her trust in Elisha, Israel’s itinerant prophet at that time.

You remember the rest of the story. Significant for our study of Israel’s
mission is Naaman’s confession in 2 Kings 5:15 following his miraculous
healing: “‘Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.
Please accept now a gift from your servant’” (NIV). Furthermore, Naaman
mentions twice the covenant name of the God of Israel, Yahweh (vss. 11 and
17). Following this, he commits to present burnt offerings only to Yahweh
and not to the other Syrian deities worshiped in Damascus. While we are
not given a complete transcription of Elisha’s conversation with Naaman,
it seems as if his knowledge of Israel’s law was sufficient so that he could
distinguish clearly between appropriate and inappropriate sacrificial worship following his healing.

Consider This: Discuss in your class the best way of communicating God’s will for humans within the context of reaching people for the kingdom.

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. Why did God choose Israel from among all the nations to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” and then specifically reveal His law to them (Exod. 19:6, NKJV)?
2. How could those nations who were not exposed to God’s law or did not come into contact with Israel find a revelation of God?
3. Why are “grace and truth” not in opposition to “law” (John 1:17)?
4. Paul describes God’s law as being holy, just, and good—and yet, when the law makes an entrance, people sin (Rom. 7:12). What makes a law good or bad, the lawmaker or the effect of the law? Give reasons for your answer.

Application Questions:

1. Death by means of crucifixion was shameful, not only for the condemned person but for his entire family and his friends, who would share the shame of association. Why were the early Christians not ashamed of the cross?
2. What part should God’s law play in missionary activities, and why?
3. Most people don’t like pain and will go to any lengths to avoid it. But not all pain is bad, as it warns of a problem and drives us to seek a cure. In what ways can the law cause spiritual “pain,” and what would the “cure” be?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: Imagine spearheading a mission into an unentered area in which the only law the people seem to have is survival of the strongest. Assuming that you could speak the language well, what would you do first? Would you explain the gospel first, or would you begin with talking about the benefits of living according to God’s law? In what order would you choose to introduce them, and why?
Christ, the Law and the Covenants

Sabbath Afternoon


Memory Text: “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Hebrews 9:15, NIV).

God’s eternal decision to save humanity has been revealed to us through the ages by the covenants. Though the Bible speaks of covenants in the plural (Rom. 9:4, Gal. 4:24, Eph. 2:12), there is really only the covenant of grace, in which salvation is given to sinners, not on the basis of their merits but on the merits of Jesus that are offered to all who claim those merits by faith. The plural, covenants, simply means that God has advanced His saving purposes by restating the covenant in various ways in order to meet the needs of His people in different times and settings. It is always, though, one covenant—the eternal covenant of God’s saving grace.

The heart of this covenant is our Lord’s steadfast, faithful love, a love that the Bible at times even equates with the covenants themselves (see Deut. 7:9, 1 Kings 8:23, Dan. 9:4). As part of that covenant, God calls His people to obey His law, not as a means of salvation but as the fruit of it. Law and grace together have always been central to God’s eternal covenant.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 7.
Covenant Signs *(Gen. 9:12–17)*

A covenant can be simply defined as an agreement between two parties based upon promises made by either one or by both parties. There are two basic methods by which a covenant can operate. In the first, both parties to the covenant agree to the terms of the relationship and make mutual promises. This would be the case in a marriage, business merger, or even the purchase of property. In the second category, one party initiates the covenant by stipulating both the promises and the nonnegotiable terms, and the other party is invited to participate. Examples include payment of taxes or enrollment at an educational institution. In both instances, either party is free to withdraw from the covenant, but there is usually a consequence. (For instance, a person who fails to pay his mortgage will lose his home, or a citizen who refuses to remit taxes will be prosecuted.)

A covenant is usually sealed with at least one symbol. For instance, a person purchasing a home places several signatures on a mortgage agreement with a lending institution, which keeps the title deed for the property in trust until the full amount is paid. Or married people are issued a legal document of marriage by the state. The symbol itself is not the covenant but an indicator that a person is obligated to a covenant.

**Read** Genesis 9:12–17 and 17:2–12. What is the difference between the symbol and the covenant in these cases? Also, what are the differences between these two covenants?

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In Genesis 9:9, God covenants with creation that He will never again destroy the earth with water. Whenever a rainbow appears in the sky, all are expected to remember God’s promise. The same is true for the mark of circumcision, which was supposed to remind every Jewish male of His people’s role in blessing the nations. One covenant was made with all humanity; the other, specifically with the nation of Israel. Also, in the covenant made with humanity after the Flood, the people didn’t have to do anything; the promise was just there, regardless of what the people did. This wasn’t so with the second one, the one made with Israel; the people had to fulfill their part of the deal.
Covenant Promises

Covenants are based on promises. In fact, it is possible to use the two terms interchangeably. Of course, when a covenant is made, it is expected that the person who makes the promise (covenant) has the ability to deliver what is promised (covenanted).

In the Old Testament, some covenants were local and limited affairs (see, for instance, Gen. 31:43–54).

The incident with Jacob and Laban demonstrates that covenants can be transactions made within and between societies. The monument at Mizpah was to serve as the sign of a treaty that would apply only to the two clans. When those to whom the treaty applied had died, the terms of the treaty would be irrelevant. Unlike this covenant made between humans, the covenants that Yahweh instituted with Noah and Abraham have everlasting implications.

How does Galatians 3:15–28 help to explain the broader implications of the Abrahamic covenant?

Throughout the Bible, God has made several universal covenants in which He makes promises that are relevant to all humanity. Recognizing that the entire earth had been affected by the Flood, Yahweh promised not to allow His creation to be devastated by water again. In the case with Abraham, God saw humanity’s need for righteousness, and so He promised to provide a blessing for all nations through Abraham’s seed (Gen. 22:18).

Though God made the Sinai covenant with a specific nation, it also has universal significance. God was very clear that any foreigner could be a part of the chosen people (for example, Exod. 12:48, 49), and Israel’s mission was to be an evangelistic light to the world (Exod. 19:5, 6).

What is your own personal understanding of your covenantal relationship with God? That is, what has God promised you, and what has He asked of you in return for those promises?
Tablets of the Covenant

Although a covenant is based on promises, there are usually conditions to meet before the promises are fulfilled. The Abrahamic covenant involved the circumcision of all males who were born either to Abraham or his descendants. When Yahweh covenanted with Israel, He personally engraved the requirements for the relationship on tablets of stone (Deut. 9:8–11). These requirements, preserved in the Ten Commandments, were to form the basis of God’s everlasting covenant with all humans.

Because they detail certain terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments are often termed the “tablets of the covenant” (Deut. 9:9, NKJV). The Ten Commandments are not intended to be an obstacle course designed to make life hard for those who have entered into the covenant with God; instead, as an expression of God’s love, the commandments have been given for the benefit of those who have entered into a covenant relationship with their Lord.

In what ways do Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 10:11–18 uphold the everlasting nature of God’s law in the new covenant?

Under the old covenant at Mount Sinai, the Israelites and those who joined the community were obligated to demonstrate faithfulness to the covenant by keeping the Ten Commandments. When they violated a commandment, they were expected to offer an animal sacrifice if they wished to have their sins forgiven.

Under the new covenant at Mount Calvary, God’s people are still obligated to keep the Ten Commandments. However, when they sin they don’t have to offer continuous sacrifices, because Jesus is their full and complete sacrifice (Heb. 9:11–14). The new covenant is so much better than the old because now, by faith, we claim the promises of forgiveness offered to us through the sacrifice of Jesus. “There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1077.

What does it mean to have God’s law written in your heart? How does this differ from merely understanding God’s law as a code of obedience?
The Covenant and the Gospel \textit{(Heb. 9:15–22)}

There were strong consequences for violating certain biblical covenants. Yahweh warned Abraham that any male who was not circumcised would be cut off from the chosen \textit{(Gen. 17:14)}, and a litany of curses was directed toward those who refused to abide by the terms of the Sinai covenant \textit{(Deut. 27:11–26)}. Ultimately, those who violated the terms of the covenant would be punished with death \textit{(Ezek. 18:4)}. The same is true for the new covenant: those who refuse to keep God’s law are also denied access to eternal life \textit{(Rom. 6:23)}.

\textbf{Read} Hebrews 9:15–28. In what ways is the gospel revealed in these verses?

Hebrews 9:15–28 repeats the gospel story as it proclaims the part that Christ plays in securing the promises for believers. Verse 15 points out that Jesus functions as the “Mediator” of the new covenant, who, through His death, offers eternal life to those who otherwise would face eternal destruction.

In verses 16 and 17, some Bible translations switch from discussing “covenant” and introduce the term “will” instead, even though the same Greek word is used. This brings in the whole idea of death, the death of Jesus for us. When viewed in that context, the passage reminds the believer that without Christ the covenant requires the death of each sinner. However, the sinner can be covered and then cleansed by Christ’s shed blood and thus be among those who “eagerly wait” His return \textit{(Heb. 9:28, NKJV)}.

“Then we shall know that our own righteousness is indeed as filthy rags, and that the blood of Christ alone can cleanse us from the defilement of sin, and renew our hearts in His own likeness.”—Ellen G. White, \textit{Steps to Christ}, p. 29.

\textbf{God Himself, in the person of Jesus, bore in Himself the punishment for our sins in order to spare us that punishment, which we deserve. What does this tell us about the character of God, and why we can trust Him, no matter our circumstances?}
Covenant Benefits (Eph. 2:6)

In many instances people can experience the promises of a covenant before all the terms are even met. For instance, a person purchasing a home has the opportunity to live in the home before it is paid for. Or a citizen enjoys the public services offered by the government before he has even started paying taxes. Those who enter into a covenant with God can also start to experience the benefits of the covenant before the promises are actualized in the future.

Think, for instance, about the Ten Commandments, and how much pain and suffering people could avoid if they simply followed them. Who hasn’t personally experienced the heartache that comes from the violation of these commandments? Even worse, the suffering that comes isn’t always limited to the one who violates the law; often others, even those closest to the sinner, suffer, as well.

According to these texts, what other benefits can we find, even now, through being in a covenant relationship with Jesus?

2 Cor. 4:16–18

1 John 5:11–13

Phil. 1:6

John 5:24

Jesus uses very strong language in the Gospel of John when He reports that those who accept Him have already “‘passed from death into life’” (John 5:24, NKJV). So confident is the believer in his or her salvation that although confined to this earth, he or she can claim to be sitting in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6).

If someone were to ask you, “What does it mean to be sitting with Jesus in heaven now (as Ephesians 2:6 says),” what would you answer, and why?

“This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ Gen. 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it, and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God’s law. . . .

“The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, and it is called the ‘second,’ or ‘new,’ covenant, because the blood by which it was sealed was shed after the blood of the first covenant. . . .

“The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant. . . .

“There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, The Faith I Live By, p. 75.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do Exodus 31:16 and Isaiah 56:4–6 suggest about the importance of the Sabbath to the covenant? See also Ezekiel 20.

2. It is often thought that the old covenant, the one established with Abraham, was a covenant of works, in contrast to the new covenant, which is of grace. Why is this idea wrong? What Bible verses can you find that prove it was always a covenant of grace? Why must it always have been by grace and never by works?

3. Though Ephesians 1 doesn’t use the phrase “everlasting covenant,” in what way do these words help us to understand why the covenant has been called that?

4. God promised that He would never again destroy the world by a flood, a promise symbolized by the rainbow. If, as some suggest, Noah’s flood were only local, what does that make of God’s promise? Why is the idea that the Flood was not global a major assault on Bible truth? (After all, look at all the local floods that have happened since then. If Noah’s flood were only local, what would these other local floods do to God’s covenant promise?)
The Lesson in Brief

▶ Key Text: Hebrews 10:12–18

▶ The Student Will:

Know: Realize that both the old and new covenants are based on faith in Jesus.
Feel: Appreciate the privilege of being in a covenant relationship with God.
Do: Claim God’s promises with confidence.

▶ Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Old and New Covenants of Grace
   A What is the difference between a promise and a covenant?
   B Why were both ancient Israel and the Christian church chosen by God to enter into a covenant relationship with Him?
   C Why does a covenant need some visible symbol?
   D Why was the Sinai covenant of universal significance?

II. Feel: The Privilege of Partnership
   A Even though we are still confined to this earth, how can we be confident of our place in heaven?
   B What blessings have you already enjoyed in your covenant relationship with God?
   C We no longer have to bring a lamb as a sacrifice. So, how then can we keep a sense of the magnitude and costly expense of Jesus’ death for us?

III. Do: Taking Hold of the Promise
   A What conditions must I meet to be able to claim God’s promises?
   B How can we enter into a covenant relationship with God? Who takes the initiative?
   C What does it mean to have God’s law written on your heart (Jer. 31:33)?

▶ Summary: Both the old and new covenants are really a restatement of the covenant of grace in which salvation is given to sinners through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Hebrews 10:12–18*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Both the old and new covenants reflect the eternal covenant of grace that is offered to all who claim Jesus' merits by faith.

In our modern world, the idea of a covenant seems very remote and old fashioned. Yet, there is one covenant relationship in which we all hope to find lifelong love and security. Marriage, while under siege and struggling, is still the dream of many. Unfortunately, although we all promise to love each other until death do us part, many marriages end up in divorce.

For Krickitt and Kim Carpenter, divorce would have sounded like an option. Just ten weeks after their wedding, they were involved in a horrific car accident that put Krickitt in a coma for four months. When she regained consciousness, she had no memory of the two years leading up to the accident and didn’t even know who her husband was. Her parents told her she was married to him. So, she accepted the fact but felt no love for Kim and didn’t even like the man. Yet, walking away was not an option for her as she knew, even though she couldn’t remember doing so, that she had taken a vow to stay with Kim. Krickitt decided to learn to love Kim, however long it might take and however hard she might find it to do so.

Kim had made a similar choice. He had married Krickitt for better or for worse. Even though she didn’t seem to want him around, he determined to win her love again. For both of them, it was a choice to stay with their marriage covenant. Three years after the accident, Kim and Krickitt got married for a second time to create new wedding memories for Krickitt. Now, almost twenty years later, they are still happily married. (Based on the book *The Vow: The Kim and Krickitt Carpenter Story.*)

For God, it would have been very easy to walk away from His covenant with us. Unfortunately, the Bible records many instances of covenant breaking on humanity’s part, but God has entered into an eternal covenant of grace with us. Despite our unfaithfulness, He still is faithful.

**Opening Activity:** A covenant can be defined as an agreement between two parties, based upon promises made by either one or both parties. Find everyday examples of covenants in your culture.

**Discuss:** What makes people break their promises? Why is God faithful to His promises?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Covenant Talk (Review briefly with your class the making of a covenant in Old Testament times, as outlined in Genesis 15.)

The making of a covenant meant serious business in the world of the Bible. In the nations surrounding Israel, covenants represented a solemnly sworn political agreement between two parties and were associated with oaths and vows. The deities of the two parties would be invoked, and blessings and curses of the covenant would be named. Often, the covenant procedures involved sacrifices and the shedding of blood. In Hebrew, the technical term for covenant making is karat berith, which means literally “to cut a covenant.” It most likely marked the killing of an animal, illustrating the possible punishment of the one covenant partner who would dare to break the covenant (compare Genesis 15).

The term covenant appears first in Genesis 6:18 in the context of God’s election of Noah and his family—even though the concept is much older. The offering suggested by Genesis 3:21 was part of a larger covenant in which God promised a Savior. As a matter of fact, the New Testament tells us that there was a divine plan of salvation that was laid before the creation of this world (1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14), and that is based on God’s everlasting love for humanity (Jer. 31:3). Revelation 13:8 describes Jesus’ sacrificial death as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” suggesting that the plan was in place when the foundation of the world was laid (NKJV).

Consider This: If you were to paraphrase biblical texts referring to a covenant, what modern word or concept would you use?

II. The Eternal Covenant (Review Hebrews 13:20 with your class.)

God’s dealing with humanity throughout history has always been consistent. Yet, at the same time, it has been contextualized. At specific times, God establishes specific covenants with specific people, beginning with Adam (Gen. 3:15–21), Noah (Gen. 6:18–20, 9:9–11), Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3, 15:1–5, 17:1–14), and so on. God speaks in a particular context and time. Noah’s covenant sign is a rainbow—something that was indeed meaningful to Noah and his family. Abraham’s sign of the covenant involves circumcision. The covenant established at Sinai, in the context of redemption from slavery, involves written laws that reiterate earlier prac-
Above all, there is the “eternal covenant” that finds its best expression in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross (e.g., Heb. 13:20, NIV). In a sense, each individual covenant described in Scripture relates to the eternal covenant made before history began, in much the same way that a Russian matryoshka doll relates to its many members. As one opens up the larger dolls and discovers smaller dolls inside, one recognizes that they all look similar, even though they have different sizes, patterns, and perhaps even colors.

Consider This: In a technology-driven world, “old” often implies outdated or obsolete, while “new” suggests crispness and cutting edge. How do old and new relate to the issue of a covenant? Discuss in your class the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

III. Old Versus New (Review 2 Corinthians 3:14 with your class.)

In the New Testament, the concept of the “old covenant” is explicitly mentioned only in 2 Corinthians 3:14, even though Galatians 4:24 implies the concept when referring to “two covenants” (and most likely also in Hebrews 8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18, “first covenant”). In order to understand the force of these surprising statements, we need to grapple with the specific context in which Paul wrote his epistles. Faced with persisting opposition from Jewish Christians who tried to make the keeping of the Jewish law (including purity laws) a significant part of the theology of the early Christian church, Paul rejects their program as it focuses upon the law as the means of salvation rather than Christ.

In order to illustrate the clear line between the “old” and “new” covenants, it is helpful to consider the covenant sign of circumcision. Circumcision was part of the conditions of God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17). Every male descendant of Abraham was to be circumcised on the eighth day, as part of an eternal covenant (vs. 7). Faithfully, every male Jewish child was circumcised according to the eternal covenant established with Abraham. It was to serve as a constant reminder that they were God’s people. God had established that sign (which was at the same time public in its ritual dimension and private in that few people would see it). Some of the Old Testament prophets employ circumcision in a different context. Jeremiah particularly uses that imagery to communicate commitment that goes beyond a mere ritual act. In Jeremiah 4:4, the prophet exhorts Judah: “‘Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem’” (NASB). Circumcision is thus described as the outward sign of an inward attitude and commitment. Similarly, in Jeremiah 6:10, the prophet shouts, “To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed” (NKJV). The close link between the physical act of circumcising a male and the “circumcision
of the heart” is a reminder that covenants are closely embedded and that “old” and “new” are inadequate terms by themselves to describe biblical covenants.

**Consider This:** Why did Paul react so vehemently in Galatians against those Jewish Christians who felt that circumcision and other purity laws had to be kept by the new Christian community? Was this not just a matter of cultural tolerance and accommodation? Why was this issue such a big deal in a world that was becoming more and more international?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Why are the Ten Commandments termed the “tables of the covenant” (*Deut. 9:9*)?
2. Hebrews 9:15 names Jesus the “Mediator” of the new covenant. Why do we need a Mediator of the covenant?
3. Why is the “shedding of blood” essential to both covenants?
4. What are the similarities and differences between the old and new covenants?

**Application Questions:**

1. What are some of God’s covenant signs that are meant to help us remember God’s promises?
2. Is God’s promise to give me eternal life a covenant promise? If so, what do I have to do to claim it?
3. All covenants function on the carrot-stick principle, offering blessings if followed and curses if broken. What are some of the blessings you have enjoyed in following God’s laws, and what are some negative consequences you have experienced in breaking His law?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** Under the old covenant, whenever the Israelites violated the covenant by breaking the Ten Commandments, they offered an animal sacrifice. This was expensive. Under the new covenant, we do not have to offer continuous sacrifices because of Jesus’ sacrifice. As a class, suggest practical steps to help us not to lose our appreciation for the great sacrifice Jesus has made for us.
The Apostles and the Law

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12, NKJV).

With so much evidence for the continued validity of God’s law, why do so many Christians argue against it?

First, some (as we have seen) look at certain New Testament texts that condemn a false understanding of the law’s function but conclude that the problem is with the law itself. As a result, they claim that the Ten Commandments are not obligatory for those under the new covenant.

Second, others are so convinced that the Sabbath is not binding on Christians that, in order to justify this position, they claim that all the commandments have been crucified with Jesus on the cross.

Third, some argue that the other nine commandments are in effect but that the fourth, the seventh-day Sabbath, has been superseded by Sunday, which is kept in honor of the resurrection of Jesus.

Numerous problems exist with all these positions. This week we’ll look at the attitude of Christ’s apostles concerning the law, because surely if it were to have been nullified or modified after Christ’s death, the apostles would have known something about it.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.
Paul and the Law

Paul, it has been said, was the true founder of Christianity. That is wrong, of course. Though Paul contributed much to our theological understanding of Christian doctrine, including 13 of the 27 New Testament books, practically all the teachings in his writings can be found elsewhere in Scripture. The main reason why some claim that Paul started a “new” religion is the misconception over his teaching about law and grace.

Look at the following texts: Romans 3:28; 6:14; 7:4; and Galatians 3:24, 25. From a first glance, why isn’t it hard to see why some think that these verses nullify the law?

Read in isolation, these texts definitely give the impression that the law is no longer relevant for the Christian. However, all these verses belong to a broader context that we must see in order to understand what Paul is truly saying.

Examine the passages in which each of the above texts occurs, paying special attention to Romans 3:31, 6:15, 7:7–12, and Galatians 3:21. How do these verses, as well as the context as a whole, help us to better understand Paul’s point about the law?

For those who don’t understand the concept of justification by faith, Paul may seem to be contradicting himself. In the same breath he claims that the Christian is not under the law; yet, the same Christian is obligated to keep the law. The problem is solved when we remember that God demands righteousness from those who claim to be in relationship with Him. The standard of righteousness is His law. However, when people measure up against His law, they fall short and are therefore condemned by the law. If the law were the means to salvation, then none would have any hope of eternal life. The hope of the Christian is not found in the law but in Jesus Christ, who not only kept the law perfectly but through God’s miraculous power allows believers to share in His righteousness (Rom. 8:3, 4). The Christian can now serve the law of God with a free conscience because Christ has taken away the law’s condemnation (Rom. 7:25–8:2). The grace that comes through Christ does not release us from the law but rather compels us to obey it.
Peter and the Law *(1 Pet. 2:9)*

Peter was one of Jesus’ closest apostles. Among the first selected, Peter was present at many of the major events in the ministry of Jesus. It was he who, at Caesarea Philippi, made the declaration that Jesus was the Messiah; and Peter followed his Savior to the house of Caiaphas on the night that Jesus was arrested and tried. And on the morning when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples by the sea, it was Peter who received specific instructions regarding the ministry of Christ. When the first group of believers gathered on the day of Pentecost, Peter was the chief spokesperson. Certainly, if the law had been changed in any way, Peter would have known.

What does Acts 10:9–14 tell us about Peter’s adherence to the Jewish law after Jesus’ ascension? If Peter thought this way about laws concerning food, what can we imagine his view was on the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments?

Peter received his vision several years after the ascension of Jesus. As a result of the disciples’ preaching, thousands of Jews had already accepted Jesus as the Messiah. There is nothing in the biblical record to suggest that the content of the Christian message included instructions to reject the law. In a powerful way, the incident in Acts 10 demonstrates that the earliest Christians fully identified with their Jewish roots.

Compare 1 Peter 2:9 with Exodus 19:6. What is the context of Exodus 19:6?

When Peter referred to his audience as a “royal priesthood, a holy nation” *(NKJV)*, they would have recalled instantly the story of the giving of the law at Sinai. As the heirs of Israel, they were expected to abide by the terms of the covenant made explicit in the law of God. So, immediately after reminding the people of their status, Peter urges them to live lives of righteousness *(1 Pet. 2:11, 12)*. He also warns his audience to be wary of false teachers promoting a law-free gospel *(2 Pet. 2:21, 3:2)*.

Remember how badly Peter messed up; and yet, look at the grace extended to him. How can we learn (1) to extend that kind of grace to others and (2) to accept grace for ourselves when we mess up?
John and the Law

John is second to Paul in the number of books contributed to the New Testament. This is the same John who wrote the Gospel, three letters, and the book of Revelation. Like Peter, he was among the first disciples Jesus chose, and he also had a special relationship with Jesus. Because of his closeness to Jesus, he is often referred to as “John the beloved.” Judging from the ending of his Gospel (John 21:25), John knew a lot of personal information about Jesus. Surely one who was as close to Jesus as John would have known if Jesus had set aside God’s law.

Read John 15:1–11 and 1 John 2:3–6. What do these verses together tell us about how we should relate to God’s “commands”?

Toward the end of His earthly life, Jesus could testify to His disciples that He had been faithful to His Father’s commandments and, as a result, had “remained” in His Father’s love (John 15:10). Jesus did not see the commandments as negative obstacles to be dismissed or discarded; rather, He saw them as guidelines for a loving relationship with Him and with other people. When John, the beloved disciple, reminds Christians of their obligation to God, he uses the same language of love and unity that Jesus does in the Gospel. In fact, John understood that love has always been the essence of the law (for example, 2 John 6). A person cannot claim to be keeping the law if he or she is not involved in loving relationships with God and other people.

“The law of God requires that we love our fellow men as we love ourselves. Then every power and action of the mind must be put forth to that end—to do the greatest amount of good. . . . How pleasing to the Giver for man to hold the royal gifts of the soul so that they shall tell with power upon others! They are the connecting link between God and man, and reveal the Spirit of Christ and the attributes of heaven. The power of holiness, seen but not boasted of, speaks more eloquently than the most able sermons. It speaks of God, and opens to men their duty more powerfully than mere words can do.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, vol. 20, p. 138.

What is your own experience with the link between law and love? That is, on a personal practical level, how is love expressed by obedience to God’s law?
James and the Law

“Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:7–9, NKJV).

There is only one book in the New Testament that is attributed to James. While the author does not stipulate which James he is, it is generally accepted that the letter comes from James, the brother of Jesus. Though perhaps at first skeptical about Jesus’ Messiahship (John 7:5), James eventually rose to an influential leadership position in the New Testament church (Acts 15:13, Gal. 1:19). Again, if Jesus had intended to abrogate the divine law, His own brother certainly would have known.

Read James 2:1–26. What is the basic message of the chapter? Why would James summarize the law as he did in verses 7–9, only then immediately to say what he said about keeping all the commandments? How do these verses show the link between love and obeying God’s law?

Misunderstanding Paul’s teaching on the law, some argue that James and Paul are opposed to each other regarding the role of the law. The major point of contention is over the place of works in salvation. Paul declares that we are saved by grace through faith apart from works (Eph. 2:8, 9), while James emphasizes that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26, NKJV). These statements are not contradictory; James is merely expressing in a forceful manner what Paul had said numerous times about grace not nullifying the law. Like Paul in Romans 13:9, James fully understands that the essence of God’s law is love (James 2:8). No one can truly claim to keep God’s commandments if he or she does not demonstrate practical acts of love.
Jude and the Law

Jude, one of the shortest books in the New Testament, is believed to have been written by another brother of Jesus. While the author refers to himself as a “slave” of Jesus Christ, he does admit to being the brother of James. Because Matthew gives James and Jude as names for two of Jesus’ four brothers (Matt. 13:55), the Jude (sometimes called Judas) of this brief epistle is generally accepted to be the Savior’s brother. As with all the other biblical writers we have studied, Jude would have known if Jesus had set the law aside.

Although Jude makes reference to neither law nor commandments, his entire letter is about fidelity to God and the consequences of transgressing His law.

Read Jude 4. What is he saying here that is relevant to our whole discussion?

The very mention of grace demands the existence of law, because grace would not be necessary if there were no sin (Rom. 5:18–6:15). What these false teachers were saying was so bad that Jude equated it with denying the Lord Himself.

How does Hebrews 3:7–19 help to shed light on Jude 5–7? How do these verses together show us the relationship between obedience and faith?

In his own diplomatic style, Jude reminds his audience about the experience of the Israelites, who had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. God had demonstrated His strength to them and had even given them His law, but when they became unfaithful, they faced terrible consequences that came from being separated from Him. Jude makes it very clear that people can, indeed, fall away, and those who do will face judgment. Jude is as clear as is the rest of Scripture: all who claim to have faith must be willing to express that faith through an obedient life.

Read the book of Jude. Amid all his strong warnings, what promises can you discover there for yourself?

“Why should the apostles teach repentance toward God?—Because the sinner is in trouble with the Father. He has transgressed the law; he must see his sin, and repent. What is his next work?—To look to Jesus, whose blood alone can cleanse from all sin. Faith in Christ is necessary; for there is no saving quality in law. The law condemns, but it cannot pardon the transgressor. The sinner must depend on the merits of the blood of Christ. ‘Let him take hold of my strength,’ says our merciful Redeemer, ‘that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.’ Our Lord declared that he would love most to whom most was forgiven; and he only will feel that he needs forgiveness who sees himself as he is, defiled by sin, a transgressor of God’s holy law. He who has the fullest conviction of the sacred claims of the law, will most clearly see the enormity of his offenses, and will feel that he is indeed forgiven much.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 5, 1886.

Discussion Questions:

1. Carefully read the above statement by Ellen G. White. How does this excerpt shed light on the biblical teachings covered in this quarter? What does it mean that a sinner must “depend on the merits of the blood of Christ”?

2. Dwell more on the warning in Jude 4. If the men are proclaiming the grace of God, they obviously are believers. Yet, Jude says that they are denying the Lord. What serious implications does this have for those who claim that God’s grace nullified the law? When people claim the law was done away with, what are they really trying to get rid of?

3. How does the denial of the law, or even of one of the commandments, play into Satan’s hands as he seeks to “overthrow” the law of God?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 3:31

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that the writings of the apostles do not demonstrate that the law was changed or nullified.

**Feel:** Feel confident in the changeless nature of God’s Word.

**Do:** Demonstrate in everyday life a loving context for speaking about God’s law.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Changeless Law
   - A What is the only context by which we can measure righteousness?
   - B Why did the apostles teach repentance? What were people supposed to be sorry for?
   - C How do James’s and Paul’s writings help us to avoid the two false extremes that people can go to concerning the law?

II. Feel: Let the Love Overflow
   - A What, according to John, has always been the essence of the law? Why? *(See 2 John 6.)*
   - B How can a Christian strive to serve the law of God with a free conscience and not be plagued by guilt?

III. Do: Embracing Context
   - A How does my lifestyle supply the context for the Seventh-day Adventist message that we are to give to the world?
   - B Why can’t we claim to keep God’s commandments if we don’t demonstrate practical acts of love?
   - C Why should anyone who claims to have faith be willing to express that faith through an obedient life?

**Summary:** The apostles make no mention of the law being nullified or modified after Christ’s death. They explain that, rather than being released from the law, grace that comes through Christ compels us to obey the law.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Romans 3:31

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The grace that comes through Christ does not release people from the law but, rather, compels them to obey it.

Just for Teachers: For most Christians, the prevailing motivation behind Sunday worship seems to be based on the idea that the law was crucified with Jesus on the cross or that Sunday was instituted by the early Christians in honor of the resurrection of Jesus. These ideas are frequently based on certain New Testament texts that are often taken out of context. Reading the apostles’ teachings in context shows that there was no nullification or modification of God’s law.

During the cold war, the U.S. government tried to develop a machine that could translate Russian. Millions of dollars were spent, and the most talented linguists in the country were involved in the project. Soon the first Russian documents were typed into the newly designed computers, and everyone waited with bated breath. Within minutes, there were sheets of English feeding through the printers but, to the dismay of everyone involved, they meant very little. The words were right and some of the grammar was also right, but no one could make any sense of it. The project was a failure, not because of a lack of time, money, or talent but because the computer could not “read” the context of the conversation. Even today, with all of our artificial intelligence in computing, the best and most reliable translator is still a human being who not only knows the language and the subject well but understands the context of the language exchange.

In this week’s study, we look at those who were closest to Jesus and examine how they saw Jesus interact with, and speak about, God’s law. They then went on to communicate this meaning in their writings for the different contexts the early Christian church faced.

Opening Activity: Imagine the following scenario. Sister Jane, who is very overweight, has expressed a desire to head up your church’s health ministry department. Your church is planning a big community outreach activity, which will involve lectures on healthy lifestyles. Would you let Sister Jane lead out in this department? Do you think she provides the right context for your health program? Why, or why not?

Discuss: How do our lives provide the context for what we are trying to
preach? Do we have to wait until we are “perfect” representatives of the truth before telling others? Give reasons for your answers.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. Dealing With Tensions *(Review Acts 6:1–6 with your class.)*

In spite of marvelous shared experiences, the early church was familiar with tensions and challenges from within. Some theological or practical issues could be dealt with easily—they had the “Word,” and many had been eyewitnesses of Jesus and had heard His message firsthand. Other issues were more complex and required praying, studying, and thinking together as a community. The book of Acts and some references in the epistles help us see some of the dynamics of the internal discussions of the early church. It may be helpful to look at some of the moments of tension in order to glean some principles of faithful, loving, and committed discussions that are so relevant in a church that faces many challenges to its unity.

One of the first references to internal tension can be found in Acts 6:1–7. The explosive growth of the early Christian church and its commitment to living shared lives (including shared property) led to complaints related to distinctions based on ethnic groups. The biblical text indicates that the Greek-speaking believers complained to the Aramaic-speaking believers because they felt that their widows were often overlooked when it came to the daily sharing of food. Acts 6:2 provides the first important clue: the Twelve gathered all the disciples into one place. Recognizing the importance of care for widows and orphans within the Christian community, but at the same time cognizant of the importance of evangelism and the proclamation of the kingdom, they suggested (apparently by consensus, since there is not one specific speaker) to elect seven deacons who would do the job. Many of the names of those selected suggest Greek roots—something that would address the concerns of the Greek-speaking believers *(vs. 5)*. The whole church was pleased and dedicated the new leaders to their role by praying and ordaining them to their special ministry. There are two important principles here: (1) we need to talk to each other, and (2) we need to find solutions that represent a win-win situation.

**Consider This:** Can all church disagreements be resolved with a win-win solution? Why, or why not?

II. Tackling Theological Tension *(Review Acts 15 with your class.)*

Tension existed in the early Christian church. We find one such example in Acts 6 over the food distribution to the widows, which did not center on a
theological issue. However, Acts 15 involves a situation that was theological. How did the church deal with this theological conflict?

The issue discussed during the first council held in Jerusalem provides a good learning moment (see Acts 15). You remember the issue at stake when the apostles met in Jerusalem. Some Jewish Christians from Judea had traveled to Antioch and had preached among the Christians that circumcision was necessary for salvation. The theological issue at stake was huge: how Jewish would the community of early Christians be? Did being a follower of Christ also mean that all the regulations of the Old Testament laws had to be fulfilled?

The biblical text notes a “sharp dispute and debate” between Paul and Barnabas and these anonymous brethren from Jerusalem (Acts 15:2, NIV). In consequence, the local Antioch church sends Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the leaders in Jerusalem. As they share God’s victories among the Gentiles, Christians belonging to the Pharisees stand up and challenge the account with the startling statement that all Gentile believers should be circumcised (vs. 5). The following section describes much discussion and several speeches by Peter (vss. 7–11), Paul and Barnabas (vs. 12), and James (vss. 13–21). Peter recalls his own experience with Cornelius while Paul and Barnabas focus upon God’s providence and blessings in their ministry. Finally, James quotes from Scripture (namely from Amos 9:11, 12) and makes a proposal: Gentiles should abstain from food dedicated to idols, from sexual immorality, and from the meat of strangled animals and blood.

There are more principles that can be gleaned from this important event in the life of the early church. First and foremost, challenging theological issues need to be discussed in a Spirit-filled environment and in community. Second, all elements of research are involved: reference is made to past Spirit-guided experience, Scripture is studied and applied to the new situation, and, based on these two criteria, a solution is reached by consensus.

Consider This: How does the appropriate tone (indicating respect and love) contribute to theological truth in a conflict situation?

III. Spirit-Led Compromise (Review James 2:14 with your class.)

Compromise is a bad word when principles are at stake. When we consider James’s compromise suggestion, it should be noted that he did not compromise on any important principle and certainly not on the key issue: salvation is by Christ alone and not by keeping laws or regulations. In other words, James reminds us that first things should be first. However, this is the same James who later writes, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” (James 2:14, NIV). Or, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (vs. 26, NIV). The point in question here is balance between justification and sanctification. Keeping a law (any law, including the Sabbath) will not secure our salvation.
Similarly, accepting Christ as our personal Savior and ignoring Him when He speaks from Sinai and the mount of Beatitudes is equally problematic.

An important postscript should be added to this quick review of two critical moments in the life of the early Christian church. The difficult issue did not just disappear. Paul’s epistles hint at repeated theological discussion about the law and its role.

**Consider This:** Think about a number of current issues of conflict in your local congregation. Some may involve lifestyle issues; others may be related to biblical interpretation. How can the lessons learned from the moments of conflict in the early Christian church help your congregation resolve key theological issues and stay focused on mission and unity?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. How can Paul claim that the Christian is not under the law, yet also claim that the same Christian is obligated to keep the law?
2. Is righteousness just the absence of sin, or is it something more? Explain.
3. Can Peter refer to his Christian readers as a “royal priesthood, an holy nation” if they no longer have anything to do with the law (1 Pet. 2:9)? Why, or why not? How does this title connect the church to the law?
4. When people claim that the law was done away with, what are they really trying to get rid of?

**Application Questions:**

1. Why is it so important to read, study, and quote Bible texts in context?
2. Why did Peter warn his audience to beware of false teachers that promote a law-free message (2 Pet. 2, 3)?
3. Why is holiness something we never can brag about?
4. How can God’s law help us to demonstrate practical acts of love?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** If you have a large Sabbath School class, you may want to subdivide the class into several groups and then, if you have time, you could have a moment for general feedback. Have each group or individual imagine being either Jude (Jesus’ brother), James (Jesus’ brother), John, or Peter. Answer the following two questions in character. How did you see Jesus relate to the law in His everyday life? What, in a one-line summary, is your position on the law of God?
Christ’s Church and the Law

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 2:16–3:7, Genesis 6, Genesis 12, Deut. 7:6–12, Gal. 3:6–16, Rev. 12:17, 14:6–12.

Memory Text: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12, NKJV).

In a relay race, a team usually consists of four runners. Team members may have competed against each other at another time, but now, as a part of the same team, they must learn to think as one. In the race itself, the length of the course is equally divided between the participants. One team member alone can race at any given time—the one who is holding the baton. The baton is skillfully passed from one team member to the next until the race is finished. In a sense, the baton is the only symbol of continuity among the members of the relay team.

God’s church is something like a relay team. Starting with Adam in the garden, the baton has been passed through several phases of salvation history: from Noah to Abraham to Sinai to the New Testament church to the Reformation church and now to those who proclaim the three angels’ messages.

The symbol of continuity for God’s church is His law, which, after the Fall, must always be coupled with God’s saving grace. Together, both are the essence of the gospel.

This week’s lesson traces the continuity of the law (and grace) in God’s church through the ages.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 21.
From Adam to Noah

In one sense, we can speak of a “church of Christ” only since the New Testament era, when believers first testified to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, we can see “Christ’s church” in a broader context. The Greek term for “church” is *ekklesia*. Borrowed from the secular world, it refers to those who have been “called out.” In every generation God has “called out” a people to reflect His will by lives of faithfulness, trust, love, and obedience.

**Read** Genesis 2:16–3:7. What test was given to Adam and Eve? Why would such a test be needed for perfect beings?

In order to be able to love, Adam and Eve had to be created as morally free agents. They had to have the ability and the freedom to do wrong, even if they had no valid reason to do so. The test at the tree was a moral test: In what way would they use their God-given moral freedom?

We know the answer.

At the center of morality is law, God’s law, which defines good and evil for us (note that the tree is called the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”). What’s the purpose of a law that forbids lying, stealing, and killing if these beings were incapable of doing any of those things to begin with? The law itself would be meaningless in a universe of automatons—beings able to do only good. That’s not, however, how God chose to create us. He couldn’t—not if He wanted beings who could truly love.

Though after the Fall Adam and Eve were to “pass the baton” to the next generation, humanity’s moral spiral downward was quick and dirty. Of their first two sons, only Abel chose to join God’s church, while Cain became possessed by the spirit of covetousness, lying, murder, and parental disrespect. Things went from bad to worse until evil overshadowed the good, and by the time of the Flood only Noah and his family could truly claim to be members of Christ’s church.

**How many times in the past 24 hours have you made moral choices, using the freedom given to us from Eden? What were those choices, and how much were they in harmony with God’s moral law?**

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From Noah to Abraham (Gen. 6:5–9)

The world into which Noah was born was worse than any society that has ever existed, which means that it must have been pretty bad. With people living for almost a thousand years, it is not difficult to see how evil could become ingrained in society to the point that God became sorry that He ever created people to begin with!

Read Genesis 6 and then answer the following questions:

1. How are we to understand the idea that God was “sorry” that He had created humanity? Why does this not mean that God had been unaware of what was going to happen? See Deut. 31:15–17.

2. Ellen G. White wrote that the designations “sons of God” and “daughters of men” refer to faithful men marrying unfaithful women. What lessons, then, can we learn from Genesis 6 about the church’s interaction with the world?

3. What were some of the things that these people did that displeased God, and how do these things relate to His law?

4. Look at the description of Noah in Genesis 6. What does the text say about him that helps us to understand the kind of man that he was, especially in such a corrupt world? At the same time, why did Noah need “grace” in the eyes of the Lord? What does this tell us about the relationship between faith and God’s law, even back then?
From Abraham to Moses

After the Flood, it was the responsibility of Noah and his sons to share God’s will with their descendants. Noah’s family knew that global destruction had come to the world as a result of humanity’s refusal to obey God’s law, and having experienced God’s grace, they could do something to help develop a more faithful generation. Unfortunately, not too long after the Flood, the inhabitants of the earth again rebelled (Gen. 11:1–9). “Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 119.

What do Genesis 12 and 15:1–6 tell us, as well, about how law and grace work together?

God called Abraham, a descendant of Shem, and made a covenant of blessing with him (Gen. 12:1–3). The Bible gives no criteria for God’s call of Abraham. He does not appear to have had the righteous profile of Noah. In fact, soon after the call he proved himself to be cowardly and deceptive (vss. 11–13), violating God’s law. Nevertheless, Abraham was a man of true faith, and by God’s grace this faith was credited to him as righteousness. Although he was not perfect, he was willing to listen to the voice of God, even if it meant trusting God for things that seem all but impossible from a human standpoint.

Abraham was not alone among those who were willing to listen to God’s voice and obey His commandments. Pharaoh, the two Abimelechs, and Joseph were well aware that God did not approve of adultery and lying. The second Abimelech even rebuked Isaac for exposing Abimelech’s people to temptation (Gen. 26:10). Although God had chosen Abraham for a specific task, there were people in many different nations who feared Him. In fact, after Abraham and his military alliance had defeated Chedorlaomer and his coalition, Abraham was blessed by King Melchizedek, who was a “priest of the Most High God” (Gen. 14:18, TEV). This is more evidence that knowledge of God existed in the world at that time, even before the work and ministry of Moses.
From Moses to Jesus

Though ancient law codes found in Egypt and Mesopotamia also provide evidence for a widespread knowledge of the principles and precepts found in God’s law, none of them is complete. In fact, many of these codes also contain laws that promote idolatry and other practices that God later condemned. So, God chose a people to be the stewards of His true law. These people were the Hebrew nation, the descendants of Abraham and heirs to the covenant promise made to him many centuries earlier—a promise whose ultimate fulfillment was found only in Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6–12. How does this passage reveal the close relationship between law and grace?

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When God chose Israel to be the depository for His law, He knew that they were an imperfect people. Nonetheless, He entrusted them with the task of sharing His will with other imperfect people. The very designation “‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (Exod. 19:6, NKJV) shows that Israel was to be God’s mediating priesthood for the entire world. Israel was the one chosen to bring the truth of God’s will to the confused nations. And, despite Israel’s mistakes, failures, and, at times, outright rebellion, it was still among these people that the Messiah came, lived, ministered, and died, fulfilling the covenant promise made to Abraham many centuries earlier.

Read Galatians 3:6–16. What does Paul write that helps to better clarify the true meaning of the covenant promise?

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Though many in ancient Israel understood the single noun form of “seed” to mean Israel as a single corporate entity, Paul here presents Jesus Himself, as the true and complete fulfillment of the covenant promise. So, the gospel itself, with its clear emphasis on both law and grace, most fully manifests and reveals the covenant.

Think about all the long ages that passed from the time Abraham first received the covenant promise to the time of Christ. What does this tell us about the need for patience when it comes to trusting God?
From Jesus to the Remnant

Since Eden, God’s church has always been filled with fallible people. The very institution that was supposed to be a witness to God’s righteousness was itself in need of that same righteousness. As “the baton” passed from generation to generation, no runner was worthy enough to cross the finish line. None who received the law was able to reach its level of righteousness. Humanity, it appeared, was trapped in a wheel of futility in its quest for God’s approval.

However, when it seemed as if all hope was gone, God sent His Son “to receive the baton.” As the Second Adam, Jesus came to this earth without sin, and through constant devotion to His Father managed to maintain His obedience all the way to the Cross. With His resurrection, Jesus crossed the finish line, for He broke the chain of death. Now, through the power of the Spirit, the resurrected Christ shares His righteousness with every believer. This message, always the center of the covenant promise, was most clearly understood after Jesus completed His earthly ministry, and the New Testament church began.

Unfortunately, the Christian church—even with all this light—proved itself at times less faithful to the covenant than was ancient Israel, and deep apostasy soon took over almost everywhere. The Reformation, beginning in the sixteenth century, started to reverse this trend, but even it faltered, and many false doctrines and teachings have remained in the Christian world, including (as we have seen) wrong views about the role and purpose of the law in the life of New Covenant Christianity. God would call out a remnant people to restore many lost truths.

Read Revelation 12:17 and 14:6–12. How do these verses reveal both law and grace in God’s final warning message to the world?

As we have seen, keeping “the commandments of God” is God’s appointed way of manifesting true love. In what ways, though, might we be outwardly keeping these commandments but not really manifesting love as we should? Why can’t we really be keeping the commandments if we don’t show love?
Further Study: “The three angels of Revelation 14 represent the people who accept the light of God’s messages and go forth as His agents to sound the warning throughout the length and breadth of the earth. Christ declares to His followers: ‘Ye are the light of the world.’ Matthew 5:14. To every soul that accepts Jesus the cross of Calvary speaks: ‘Behold the worth of the soul: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” ’ Mark 16:15. Nothing is to be permitted to hinder this work. It is the all-important work for this time; it is to be far-reaching as eternity. The love that Jesus manifested for the souls of men in the sacrifice which He made for their redemption, will actuate all His followers.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 455, 456.

“The theme of greatest importance is the third angel’s message, embracing the messages of the first and second angels. All should understand the truths contained in these messages and demonstrate them in daily life, for this is essential to salvation. We shall have to study earnestly, prayerfully, in order to understand these grand truths; and our power to learn and comprehend will be taxed to the utmost.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 196.

Discussion Questions:

1. Revelation 12:17 describes the “remnant” as those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. With the presence of hundreds of other Sabbath keeping Christian churches around the globe, what is the specific purpose of Seventh-day Adventism? What are we proclaiming and teaching that these other churches aren’t, even those who might be keeping the seventh-day Sabbath?

2. Read Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23, all in context. How do these verses help us to understand salvation by faith?

3. Notice that in the first angel’s message, which begins with the “everlasting gospel,” there is also a proclamation that the “hour of his judgment has come.” So, the gospel, the law, and judgment all appear together in the three angels’ messages. How do we understand the role of the law and grace in judgment? How do they all fit together?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Revelation 14:12

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Recognize that throughout history God has had a people who were called to reach out to the world on His behalf.
- **Feel:** Appreciate the privilege of being part of God’s family.
- **Do:** Participate in proclaiming the three angels’ messages to the world.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Our Reason for Being

- **A** Why didn’t God create us as unable to do anything wrong but only able to do good?
- **B** Why did even Noah who is designated as “just” need to find “grace” (Gen. 6:8, 9)?
- **C** How does the mention of Melchizedek demonstrate that a knowledge of God’s commandments existed before the ministry of Moses?
- **D** Why did God choose Israel to be the depository for His law?

II. Feel: Privileged to Serve

- **A** What has always been the center of the covenant promise?
- **B** How are we, as a remnant people, supposed to relate to others not of our faith?
- **C** A long time passed before Abraham had the son that he had been promised. Why does God insist on our developing patience?

III. Do: Called for a Time Like This

- **A** How can my faith in Jesus be credited to me as righteousness?
- **B** Why did God give us the freedom to do wrong if we are not supposed to do it?
- **C** Why am I a Seventh-day Adventist?

**Summary:** In every generation, God has “called out” a people to reflect His will by living lives of faithfulness, trust, love, and obedience.
Learning Cycle

 ►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Revelation 14:12

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God’s people throughout the ages were always called to live and preach His saving grace, which makes living according to His law possible.

Just for Teachers: In some areas of the world, the Seventh-day Adventist Church seems to be in an identity crisis. Seventh-day Adventists almost seem to be ashamed of our distinctive truths. Some see the application of the term remnant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an exclusivist idea. In this lesson, we want to emphasize that the term remnant, while being biblically based, carries with it not a sense of superiority but a validation for mission. We are privileged to be part of the thread of God’s salvation story that began in Eden and will conclude with Jesus’ second coming.

Begin researching your family tree, and you may discover ancestors from countries that once were part of imperial Russia, such as Belarus, Moldova, and Poland. Or you may learn you have Portuguese or African ancestors. Everyone has heard of Sitting Bull and Sacajawea; but could you be related to them?

Strangely enough, as our families are breaking up and many children are growing up without getting to know a parent, more people than ever want to know their ancestry. Tracing family history is enjoying a boom at the moment. The reach of the Internet makes things quicker and less complicated as registries and immigration records, even ship logs, are being digitized. Most of us would like to think that we are related to nobility or a national hero, but, for most of us, our family tree would include some people who got into trouble with the law—perhaps a few murderers, alcoholics, and wife beaters.

Since Eden, there has been a family line that God has maintained through both the Old and New Testaments. They were a family on a mission. They were called out to invite the world to join God’s family and to show what a godly inheritance could look like.

Opening Activity: Do you have any interesting ancestors? Did anyone leave you a legacy that you are particularly proud of? What is the greatest legacy that our Adventist spiritual ancestors have left us?

Discuss: How is the family metaphor used in both the Old and the New
Testaments to depict God’s church?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Remnant in History (Review 1 Kings 19:14–18 with your class.)

Throughout history, God has had His people on planet Earth. When Adam and Eve decided to trust the serpent rather than their Creator, they actually signed their death warrant. Their access to the tree of life was blocked; slowly, but surely, they felt muscle pains and fatigue, and they discovered wrinkles and gray hairs. Yet, God had a plan, and the plan had a name. When God established a covenant with individuals or people, it was not necessarily for singling out the best, the fastest, the fittest, or the strongest. He called them so that they could call others. However, external and internal strife kept on threatening God’s people. Whether through invasion by foreign powers or the slow and often imperceptible slide toward syncretism or crass idolatry, God’s people were reminded throughout history that they were part of a larger conflict between good and evil, between God and Satan. There were many times in history where it seemed as if God’s side would be completely wiped out. Just remember the wickedness that led to the Flood or Elijah’s conversation with God on Mount Horeb when the prophet felt that he was the only one left who worshiped the Lord (1 Kings 19:14). God quickly cleared up that misconception, but even those 7,000 that had not bent their knees before Baal represented a small group within Israel. They truly were a remnant (vs. 18).

Consider This: Many dissertations and monographs have been written to explain the biblical concept of the remnant. Ask your class to provide a one-sentence definition of the concept.

II. Characteristics of God’s Remnant (Review Revelation 12 and 19:10 with your class.)

In the following, we will review a number of important ideas included in a chapter by Ángel M. Rodríguez, “God’s End-Time Remnant and the Christian Church,” in Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective, Ángel M. Rodríguez, ed. (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), pp. 201–226.

1. God wants to communicate His saving grace through His remnant. Since Jesus came to seek and save the lost, the concept of the remnant and the Person of Christ are intricately connected. We need to keep in mind the intricate link between God’s remnant (also the end-time remnant) and Jesus Christ.
2. Throughout history, God maintained a faithful remnant. Revelation 12–14 describes the beginning, continuation, and end of the conflict between Christ and Satan. It is important to note that, in spite of persecution and even coexisting with ungodly powers that derive their strength from the dragon, God’s remnant remains a faithful witness and is called to proclaim in a clear and unmistakable manner God’s final message to the world. We often speak about the three angels’ messages (Rev. 14:6–12), which represent not only a specific message in a specific time in history to a specific people but also repeat, in different terms, the main pillars of the plan of salvation, focusing upon Creation and worship, a fallen church, and present judgment leading to a new creation. This is truly the gospel for our time.

3. While God’s remnant has always been present as a witness in the great cosmic theater, we often wonder today how it relates to other churches (or even religions). We notice denominational fragmentation amid a call for ecumenical cooperation. God’s oikumene (that is, the “universal community of faith”) is not based on creeds and organizations. It is marked by faithfulness to His Word (including His law) and the proclamation of the soon return of Christ—the Lamb that was slain but is now depicted as Lion and Judge and Conqueror.

4. Scripture has always emphasized the concept of the church as a body with Christ as its Head. Since the remnant is not primarily identified by membership but by belief and practice, we are called to faithfulness to the Head. This faithfulness is expressed in life and one’s relation to the Word—both the Written and the Living Word. It is here that we note the juncture between the biblical concept of the remnant and God’s law.

5. Revelation 12:17 describes the characteristics of the remnant (or the faithful who remain) at the end of time as obedience to God’s commandments and commitment to the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 1:2, 12:17, and 20:4 all refer to the “testimony of Jesus” and link it to the Word of God—including the commandments of God in Revelation 12:17. Revelation 19:10 adds an important qualifier, “‘For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’” (italics added), a phrase that occurs only once in Scripture and refers specifically to prophetic ministry (compare Rev. 19:10 and 22:8, 9). God’s law and the commitment to God’s prophetic gift (throughout history as demonstrated in the Word and particularly in the last moments of history) both point to a humble acceptance of the will of God marking the end-time remnant (compare Gerhard Pfandl, “Identifying Marks of the End-Time Remnant in the Book of Revelation,” in Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective, pp. 139–158).

6. Importantly, a careful reading of Revelation as a whole reminds us that these characteristics are not limited to one particular group. Yes, God keeps His remnant throughout history, but He also calls out of confusion and lukewarmness and sin those who have committed their lives to Christ and are willing to follow His Word to the end. In John 10:16, Jesus describes this group as follows: “‘I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them
also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd’ ” (NASB). In Revelation 18:4, this group is described as living in Babylon but called to come out of her.

7. Finally, the eschatological remnant is not only faithful to God’s commandments and His spirit-filled prophets, it also follows the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4). It is this love and commitment to Christ, and the recognition that He is our only means of salvation, that enables this group to share the everlasting gospel with every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. After all, God calls those who are willing to call others.

**Consider This:** As you think about the important biblical concept of the remnant, discuss in your Sabbath School class the best way of interacting with other Christians and non-Christians in this particular time in history. How can we be agents of hope that represent the Master faithfully?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What does it mean that Adam and Eve were created as morally free agents?
2. How did obedience to God’s commands and faith in God’s promises play out in the life of Noah?
3. How could Abraham’s faith be credited to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:9)?
4. How is the proclamation of the gospel, as well as the validity of the law, enclosed in the first angel’s message of Revelation 14?

**Application Questions:**

1. How can we avoid feelings of superiority or exclusivism when using the term remnant?
2. Why did God need to test Adam and Eve, seeing that they were perfect? Does He still need to test us?
3. What are we as Seventh-day Adventists known for in our communities? Is this what we were really called into existence for?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** Being part of a family always requires responsibilities, as well as privileges. Brainstorm on the privileges and responsibilities of being a Seventh-day Adventist. Why would it be important to keep this in mind as we interact with others who are not Seventh-day Adventists?
Christ’s Kingdom and the Law

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 4:8, 9; Dan. 2:44; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Rev. 22:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:26.

Memory Text: “‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (Jeremiah 31:33, NKJV).

In 2011 Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, died. He was 56. Years earlier, after a bout with cancer, Jobs called death “the single best invention of life” because it forced us to achieve the best we could here. In other words, because our time is so limited, we must try to be as successful as we can now.

Jobs, though, got it backward. What pushed him to seek a greater stake in this world, death (or at least the inevitability of it), should have been what revealed the futility of putting down roots too permanently here, in what’s always shallow ground. Sure, Jobs accomplished a lot, but in contrast to a million years or to eternity, what does it matter?

Indeed, we have been promised that this world and all that’s in it will be destroyed, and God will establish a new and eternal world where sin and death (all the result of the violation of God’s law) will never exist.

This week we’ll look at the question of God’s eternal kingdom and the role of the law in relation to it.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.
The Kingdom of God

When God created the first human beings, He gave them dominion over all things. Adam was to rule the world. However, through violating God’s law, he forfeited his right to earthly sovereignty, and ownership went to the archenemy, Satan. When the representatives from the other worlds gathered before God during the time of the patriarchs, it was Satan who appeared as the “delegate” from earth (Job 1:6).

Read Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 4:8, 9. What do these verses tell us about Satan’s power in this world?

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What happened during the wilderness temptations is very revealing. Satan offered to give Jesus rulership over all the earthly kingdoms if Jesus would fall down and worship him (Matt. 4:8, 9; see also Luke 4:5–7). Jesus came to take the world back from Satan, but He could do so only at the cost of His life. How strong, then, the temptation must have been when Satan stood there and offered to give the world to Him! However, in bowing to Satan, He would have fallen into the same trap as had Adam and, consequently, would also have been guilty of violating His Father’s law. Had He done so, the plan of salvation would have been aborted, and we’d be dead in our sins.

Of course, we know that Jesus stayed victorious, and, in His victory, we have the assurance and promise of our own, which is life in God’s everlasting kingdom, the one depicted in Daniel 2, when the stone cut out without hands destroys all kingdoms of this world. And then, afterward, “‘the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever’ ” (Dan. 2:44, NKJV).

All the kingdoms depicted in Daniel 2 did everything predicted about them, including the continued disunity in Europe, symbolized by the iron and clay in the toes of the statue. Why should these incredible facts help us trust in the promise of the last kingdom, the one that will “stand forever”?
Citizens of the Kingdom

In many nations, those who move there from other countries have to surrender all allegiances to their land of birth if they want citizenship in their new country. However, some countries allow a person to hold dual citizenship; that is, they can pledge allegiance to both places.

There’s no such thing as dual citizenship, however, in the great controversy. We are on one side or the other. The kingdom of evil has been battling the kingdom of righteousness for millennia, and it is impossible for a person to be faithful to both at the same time. We all have to make a choice about whose kingdom will have our allegiance.

Read 1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 11:13, Ephesians 2:12, Colossians 1:13, Deuteronomy 30:19, and Matthew 6:24. What do these texts tell us about the impossibility of “dual citizenship” in the great controversy between Christ and Satan? What role does keeping the law have in helping to show where our citizenship truly resides? See Rev. 14:12.

Once people make a decision to follow Christ, they have chosen to turn their back on the devil’s kingdom. He or she is now part of another commonwealth, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a result the person now obeys His rules, His law, His commandments, not those of the devil. The person’s obedience, however, isn’t universally appreciated—certainly not by the devil, who is anxious to get these people back, and often not by other people, as well, who tend to distrust the “strangers and pilgrims” among them. Despite these obstacles, God has a people whose first allegiance is to Him, not to the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31, NKJV).

So often foreigners in a country stand out because they are different. How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, as “strangers and pilgrims here,” stand out, as well? Or do we?
Faith and the Law

The dominant theme in Scripture is simple: God is love. God’s love is most potently demonstrated in His grace. With His unlimited power, He could easily have wiped humanity from the face of the earth, but, instead, He chose to exercise patience and give all a chance to experience the fullness of life in His eternal kingdom. Even more so, His love is revealed in the price that He Himself paid at the Cross.

God’s love is also directly related to His justice. Having provided countless opportunities for people to choose their own destiny, the God of love will not force them into a kingdom that they have rejected. When the wicked stand before God’s throne in the judgment, they are condemned by their own testimony. No one who stands before the throne can truthfully say that he was unaware of God’s requirements. Whether through written or natural revelation, all have been exposed to the basic principles of the law of God (Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:12–16).

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Revelation 22:14, 15. Who gets into God’s kingdom, who stays out, and why? What role does God’s law play here? Also, notice the stark contrast between the two groups!

What’s fascinating is that if you put 1 Corinthians 6:11 together with Revelation 22:14, you get faithful Christians who are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, they are “justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28, NKJV); yet, they also keep that law.

“It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven: they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 18. How do these words help us to understand better the painful topic about the fate of the lost?
June 25

The Everlasting Kingdom

God created a perfect world. Sin entered, and that perfect world became severely marred. The story of redemption tells us that Jesus entered human history so that, among other things, the original perfection will be restored. The redeemed will live in a perfect world where love reigns supreme.

As we have seen, love can exist only in a moral universe, only in a universe with moral beings, and to be moral they must also be free. This prompts the question: could evil arise again?

How do Daniel 7:27, John 3:16, and Revelation 21:4 help to answer the question about whether evil will arise again? What is the significance of the term everlasting?

When God created the universe, there were conditions attached to its stability. This is most evident in Genesis 2:17, where Adam was warned that violation of God’s expressed command would result in death. The very mention of death indicates that the concept of eternity from a human perspective was conditional. Adam would have experienced eternal life only if he maintained loyalty to God.

However, in the re-created earth, death will no longer be a reality, which means that we will live forever, a fulfillment of the many promises of Scripture. Whether rebellion could occur is really a moot point. The fact is, it won’t.

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What principle do we see here that helps us to understand why evil won’t rise again?

The Messianic kingdom will comprise people who have maintained loyalty to God throughout their religious experience. In the face of persecution and personal struggles, they chose the path of obedience and demonstrated their willingness to live lives of divine service. God promises to inscribe His law in their hearts so that they will naturally do the things that are pleasing to Him. In the kingdom of Christ, sin is entirely vanquished, and righteousness reigns supreme.
The Law in the Kingdom

Of all the harsh consequences of sin, death has been the most persistent. Sin can be overcome, Satan can be resisted, but with just two known exceptions (Enoch, Elijah) out of billions, who has escaped the inevitability of death? “When it comes to death,” wrote an ancient philosopher, “we human beings all live in an unwalled city.”

What message is found in Revelation 20:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:26?

With the power ascribed to death, it is no wonder that just before Christ establishes the Messianic kingdom on earth, He will first utterly destroy death.

There is no question that death is related to sin, which means it’s related to God’s law, as well; because sin is violation of God’s law. Consequently, there can be no sin without the law. Although sin is dependent on the law, the law is independent of sin. That is, the law can exist without sin. In fact, it did for all the ages until Lucifer rebelled in heaven.

“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.”—Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 109.

With this in mind, the absence of death and sin in the kingdom of God does not require the absence of the law. Just as the law of gravity is necessary for the harmonious interaction between the physical elements of the universe, God’s moral law is needed to govern the righteous interaction between the saints. When God inscribes His law in the hearts of the redeemed, His sole purpose is to seal their decision to walk in the way of righteousness for eternity. Consequently, His law becomes the very essence of His kingdom. So, we have every reason to believe that the principles of God’s moral law will exist in God’s eternal kingdom. The difference, of course, is that those principles will never be violated there as they have been here.

Try to imagine the perfect environment of heaven: no fallen natures, no devil to tempt us, no sin, and no death. Now ask yourself: what things in your life and character would not fit very comfortably in such an environment?

“Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God’s commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God’s precepts. . . .

“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, pp. 314, 315.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read the Ellen G. White statement in today’s further study. In what ways are both law and grace revealed in it? Why is it crucial that we always understand them both together? What happens when these concepts are taught apart from each other?

2. The introduction to this week’s study talked about the late Steve Jobs and his claim that the specter of death, our own death, should drive us to accomplish all that we can here. Though there’s some truth to that idea, in and of itself it’s not enough. It never solves the problem of death itself and what death does to the meaning of the lives that precede it. In fact, after Jobs’ death, the cover of the New Yorker magazine depicted Peter, iPad in hand, checking Steve Jobs in at the pearly gates. Though that might be cute, what lesson can we learn from the fact that there probably won’t be any iPads, or anything that Steve Jobs created here, in heaven?

3. What things are on the earth now that will last forever? What won’t last past the final destruction of this world? Why is it crucial that we know the difference between them?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Daniel 2:44

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that sin and death will be done away with.
Feel: Joyfully anticipate the new earth.
Do: Resolve to commit fully to God’s kingdom.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Down With Death
   A. Why can love exist only in a moral universe?
   B. Why didn’t Jesus take the easy route to gain rulership of the earth by bowing down to Satan (Matt. 4:8)?
   C. How does God’s law directly relate to His justice?
   D. Why will evil never arise again after God destroys sin?

II. Feel: Our Great Hope
   A. How can we feel a part of our communities and yet be “not of the world” (John 17:14)?
   B. As new citizens in God’s kingdom, we should feel allegiance to Him. How will we demonstrate our allegiance?
   C. As we struggle with sin and death as the consequences of breaking God’s law, how can we maintain an attitude of hope?

III. Do: Our Pledge of Allegiance
   A. Why can’t we possess dual citizenship in the great controversy between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil?
   B. How can a focus on heaven make us better prepared to live meaningful lives and be better citizens in the here and now?
   C. What happens to our spiritual lives if we emphasize law over grace or grace over law?

Summary: God will establish a new and eternal world where all the results of the violation of God’s law will no longer exist. Each of us is called to accept the offer of citizenship in God’s kingdom.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Daniel 2:44*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We cannot sit on the fence spiritually. It is impossible for a person to be faithful to both God and Satan at the same time. We all have to make a choice in regard to whose kingdom we will show our allegiance to.

**Just for Teachers:** The issue of the validity of God’s law is not just an issue that we face nowadays. Sin originally started with Satan questioning God’s character, which was reflected in His law. So, sin entered our perfect world and severely marred it. Jesus entered human history to save us and restore us. In the re-created earth, God’s law will be followed, and love will reign supreme.

The story is told of a very shy lady who came to know Jesus. She didn’t seem to have any great talents to use for God. So, she quietly found her niche in the church and faithfully served by always organizing the church potlucks. Many years later, she contracted a terminal illness and was admitted to the hospital. When the pastor came to visit, she told him that she was ready to die. Her eyes shone as she told him how she was looking forward to Jesus coming and waking her up. She wanted to share with others her hope. She asked the pastor to see to it that when people came for the viewing at her funeral that her Bible was placed in her left hand and, in her right hand, she wanted a plastic fork. The pastor could understand the Bible, but why the plastic fork? “Pastor, I have helped out with potlucks for so many years. And week after week, I have reminded people to keep their forks for the dessert. When they see the fork, they will ask and then you tell them that I want everyone to know that the best is still to come!”

This quarter, as we have been studying God’s law and wonderful grace, we must remember to keep an eye on the big picture. Sin and death will not have the last word. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have the privilege of telling the world that the best is yet to come in a re-created perfect world.

**Opening Activity:** What do we remember the following people for: Johann Sebastian Bach, Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs, Napoleon, Mother Teresa? What would you like to be remembered for? Why?

**Discuss:** Would it be possible to be so “heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good”?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Human creation does not really begin in Genesis 1. Creation began when God, compelled by love for creatures not yet made, conceived of a planet that was beautiful and lush and inhabited by beings who would reflect in a special way the image and likeness of their Creator. This creation was based on heaven’s law that governed the universe. This law meant life and order and beauty and creativity, and it was based on the love of God—Father, Son, and Spirit—because only love can dream up such a wonderful world.

I. Cosmic Dimensions (Review Isaiah 14:12–19 and Ezekiel 28:12–20 with your class.)

Unfortunately, this is no “and they lived happily ever after” story, because distrust and doubt and envy had somehow entered the heavenly realm. Revelation 12 describes the rebellion led by somebody who once was known as Lucifer, who wanted to be above the stars of God and be like the Most High (Isa. 14:12–19; compare the description in Ezek. 28:12–20). Ambition drove a created being to doubt the divine motives expressed in the divine law. This doubt was injected into a perfect world—with only one “imperfection”: the creatures that God had made were not robotlike followers; they had been endowed with the freedom to make decisions. As the serpent speaks, “we see misrepresentation turning into distrust, distrust maturing into alienation, and alienation ripening into fear (Gen. 3:1, 6, 8, 10).”—Sigve K. Tonstad, The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), p. 464. Revelation 12 describes, in the context of a cosmic war, how Lucifer’s doubt infected other members of the cosmic family, and how humanity fell into the same trap.

Consider This: Discuss with your study group the implications of God’s creation of human beings, created with the capacity to choose. What does it say about the Creator? What does it say about the laws that had been put into place by the Creator?

II. God’s Plan—No Afterthought (Review 1 John 3:8 and John 8:44 with your class.)

Yet, God had a plan all along, even while He knew, as an omniscient Being, the end from the beginning. God, in the Son, would offer Himself as a sacrifice and once again level the playing field. Humans could again make a choice—something that is expressed repeatedly in the divine call through
prophets and others to choose God over Baal (or money or pleasure or self).

The issues of the cosmic struggle that unfolded involved questions concerning God’s integrity. First John 3:8 states that “the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (NASB). A devil who sinned in the beginning suggests a framework (or laws) that existed during the rebellion in heaven. But beyond the issue of the transgression of a divine law, we need to consider the issue of the questioning of God’s character, which is reflected also in the serpent’s insinuating remarks to Eve in Genesis 3. John 8:44 contains Jesus’ description of the archenemy: “‘He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies’” (NASB). Christ’s description of Satan involves murder and lying—both of which are violations of God’s moral law.

**Consider This:** Why is it important that salvation is not an afterthought or emergency response by God?

**III. Can God Be Just and Merciful?** *(Review Revelation 12:10, Zechariah 3:1–5, and Job 1 with your class.)*

Another important issue in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan involved the relationship between Creator and created being. Autonomy and self-actuation are part of the claim that Lucifer maintained (Isa. 14:12–19). The shining morning star wanted to be his own master and on par with God. Finally, God’s justice and mercy were imperiled when Satan challenged the Trinity in heaven. Because Satan is constantly accusing God’s people, the issue of divine justice needs to be understood in this conflict (Rev. 12:10, Zech. 3:1–5; compare Job 1). Is God really fair? Does He have favorites? How does salvation work? How can He forgive a sinner who has transgressed His divine law?

During the entire quarter, we have studied different aspects of God’s initiative to answer these questions once and for all. The first promise, given to Adam and Eve, pointed to the One who would smash the head of the serpent. Sacrifice and rituals in the earthly sanctuary served as object lessons of the divine plan. The prophets throughout the Old Testament period spoke about the Messiah and added puzzle pieces that would result in a bigger picture. And then, finally, the creative Word that had spoken the planet into existence became flesh and camped with us. Jesus demonstrated both the seriousness of sin and the wonder of the divine plan of salvation. His example served to lift up God’s law and character. His preaching pointed to the principles of the kingdom that were distinct from those espoused by fallen Lucifer. His sacrifice paid the price for sin and our sins—an innocent Victim had been slain and ransomed the
guilty, who needed to rely completely on this sacrifice.

While the great controversy is not over yet, the victory is sure. God’s law and His character have been vindicated by God Himself, who demonstrated its viability and was willing to pay the price that transgression costs.

**Consider This:** As you think about the great controversy, how does this cosmic conflict play out in your own life?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What accusation about God’s law did Satan launch in heaven? How did Jesus disprove it?
2. How did Satan manage to parade himself in heaven as earth’s representative?
3. How has all humankind been exposed to the basic principles of the law of God?
4. How accurate is Daniel 2 in proving and in considering the current European economic and political realities?
5. Some teach that because God is love, He will eventually let everyone into heaven. The Bible, however, teaches that the wicked will be excluded from heaven. What disqualifies them from heaven?

**Application Questions:**

1. What happens if we emphasize the law at the expense of grace or vice versa? What practical effects will this have on our lives?
2. As a new citizen, one is obligated to follow the laws of his or her new country. What does this have to do with the Christian and God’s law?
3. How can we live as “strangers and pilgrims here” and yet be the “salt of the earth” as we impact our world on social, economic, and political issues?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** Heaven is often depicted in contemporary culture as a place where we all wear white sheets and spend eternity sitting on a fluffy white cloud strumming a small harp. Nothing could be further from the truth. Spend a moment sharing what you imagine heaven to be like. How will the absence of sin and death impact your life? What are you most looking forward to?