

The Law of God and the Law of Christ



SABBATH—MAY 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 19:16–22; John 13:34, 35; Galatians 6:1–5; Acts 17:31; John 5:30.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. In the same way, I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love’ ” (John 15:10, NIRV).

IN MOST NATIONS THERE ARE LAWS. At the top are laws that come from the national government for all who live in that country. Then there are laws for smaller areas of the country for the people who live in them. Finally, local laws rule the smallest districts. Each area within a country is permitted to make laws for its people. But no one can make a law that is more powerful than the law of the nation. And situations may require that a certain law be used in different ways. But what the law is used for cannot go against the spirit of the law.

As the Head of the universe, the Creator God has established laws for all of His people. When Jesus Christ changed Himself into human flesh, He gave Himself to a life of obedience to His Father (Philippians 2:5–11) and to His commandments. So, everything that Jesus taught about the law and all of the commandments was always in full agreement with the law of God.

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS (SPECIAL MESSENGERS) (Matthew 5:17)

Some believe that the Ten Commandments were for the Israelites only before the Cross. So they believe the commands are not in effect (still practiced) in the New Testament period of grace.¹ Others teach that Christians are free from the old law. They also teach that only the Jews, and not Christians, are still expected to obey it. The Bible does teach that the works of the law can save no one. But no verses give a person license (permission) to break God's law. If such a verse did exist, it would be a license to sin. And the Bible would "argue" with itself on a very important topic.

We remember that God wrote His covenant (promise) to Israel on tablets of stone that held the law. But the Bible has many other commandments that cover details not found in the Ten Commandments. The rabbis tried to help people to understand God's will better. So the rabbis counted 613 laws, which included the Ten Commandments. But Jesus appears to go beyond the rabbis when He announces that He has not come to "get rid of what is written in the Law or in the Prophets" (Matthew 5:17, NIV; emphasis supplied). The Ten Commandments are brief (short), but the law of God includes every command spoken by God to or through His prophets.

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

There are hundreds of commandments that God has shown in His Word (the Bible). But the Ten Commandments give solid principles (important rules) that can be used with all other laws. So, Jesus mentioned five of the Ten Commandments when He was speaking to the rich young ruler. There is an even shorter summary of God's law in the commandments found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. These verses command us to love God and to love our neighbor. Jesus says, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40, NKJV). Most important, Jesus and His Father are united (joined) as One in purpose as They encourage the people of God's creation to love as They have been loved. These verses also point out that obedience to the law is the foundation on which that love is to be given.

What in your life points to your love for God and for your neighbor?

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

THE “RULES” OF LOVE (John 15:10)

The Bible gives several examples of Jesus’ faithfulness to the law of God. For example, Jesus’ words in Luke 2:49 suggest that at a young age He understood who He really was. This happened when His earthly mother (Mary) told Him that she felt hurt because He had strayed from the family. But He humbly went home with His parents and “was obedient to them” (Luke 2:51, NIV). At another time, Jesus refused to bow to Satan when He was tempted² in the wilderness because worship was for God alone (Luke 4:8). And there are several examples of His Sabbath keeping. (One example is Luke 4:16.) Paul wrote that Jesus’ entire life was dedicated to obeying God’s will all the time (Philippians 2:5–11). Hebrews says that Jesus was tempted, but He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). So, Jesus could say as He was reaching His last hours, “I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15:10, NIV).

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. We as humans are not used to talking about rules of love. But a person could say that, in a real sense, the Ten Commandments are those rules. They explain how God wants us to love Him and others.

God is love (1 John 4:16). So, in giving His commandment to His disciples (John 13:34, 35), Jesus is just making clearer the law of love that started in His Father (John 3:16). Now more than just loving each other as ourselves, we are to love as Jesus loved us.

“At the time when Jesus spoke these words, the disciples could not understand them. But they witnessed the sufferings of Christ. They saw His crucifixion and return to life. They watched Him go to heaven. They also received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. [Read Acts 2:1–4.] Afterward, they had a clearer understanding of the love of God. They also had a better understanding of the nature of that love which they must have for one another.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*, page 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 to self so that we can give such love?



By refusing to bow to Satan, Jesus showed that He knew He was God.



We are to love others as Jesus loved us.

DEFINITIONS

2. tempted—being presented with an opportunity (chance) to do wrong.

ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)

What point is Paul making about the law in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23? Why are his feelings so strong about the law?



God desires that we accept His gift of eternal life to live with Him forever.

God desires that all people accept His gift of eternal life and become citizens of His everlasting kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul writes about his plan of getting people interested in God’s kingdom. Paul understands that there are cultural barriers (obstacles) that discourage people from making a decision for the gospel. Paul is willing to make certain changes to fit in with the culture of the group so that they may be saved.

All who become a part of God’s kingdom will come under His law. As a result, those who minister (work) for God must also follow God’s will. Paul is quick to say that he uses creative ideas to reach people. But he is always careful to follow God’s law. Paul’s desire to save people will not let him “bend” the laws of God. He may make certain changes to fit in with cultural laws as long as those changes do not break God’s law. The principle that governs Paul’s method is the “law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:21, NASB).

We can also understand Paul’s point about 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 chosen few. Paul does not plan for the law of Christ to be a substitute for the law of God. The two work together to introduce those saved by grace to the law of a loving God. Paul openly explains all that he is willing to do to reach the lost. This is a perfect example of the kind of self-sacrificing love that is described in the “law of Christ.”

How much self are you willing to give up in order to reach others for Christ? How much self have you already given up in reaching out to others? How much of the “law of Christ” do you follow?

FULFILLING THE LAW OF CHRIST (Galatians 6:2)

On paper or in nature, the law of God describes His will to every person who can understand it (Romans 1:20; Romans 2:12–16). As a result, no one can say that he or she does not know the basic requirements of God. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory [perfect life] of God” (Romans 3:23, NKJV). So they will be destroyed (Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4). But all is not lost. This curse has been prevented by the gift of eternal life. This gift has been made available through the life, death, and resurrection (return to life) of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

According to Paul, grace gives the believer the ability to live an obedient life (Romans 6:15; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11–14). But as we all know too well, we do not always live as obediently and faithfully as we should.

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

It is important to remember that everyone can be tempted. Anyone can surrender to sin in moments of weakness. So it is insensitive for a person to quickly criticize a fellow Christian who has fallen. Even Jesus, who had never sinned, was willing to help those who had been overcome by sin. As Ellen G. White wrote of Jesus, “He did not censure [criticize] human weakness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, page 353. Paul asked Christians to help bring others back to God (Galatians 6:1). In other words, the person who has sinned should be encouraged to follow God’s law once again.

The law of Christ is driven by mercy. Had it not been for Christ’s sacrifice and death, there would be no reason to keep the law of God. But because Christ has made eternal life possible, there is a good reason for the faithful to go back to keeping God’s law after moments of weakness. Fellow believers should use the law of Christ as a way of bringing the sorrowful sinner back to God’s law of love.

Think about a time when you messed up and received grace that you did not deserve. (After all, if you did deserve it, it would not be grace.) How can you be sure to remember the grace that you have received the next time that someone needs some grace from you?



Jesus never criticized human weakness.

LAW AND JUDGMENT (John 5:30)

God's law is a law of mercy. But soon He will use it to judge those to whom He has shown mercy. God has continued to give opportunities for sinners to repent (turn back to God) and pledge loyalty to Him. But the hour is coming when the cry will go out, " 'Let those who do wrong keep on doing wrong. Let those who are evil continue to be evil. Let those who do what is right keep on doing what is right. And let those who are holy continue to be holy' " (Revelation 22:11, NIV). This announcement serves as a warning about the final judgment.

In Revelation 14:7, the first angel preaches God's judgment. Many other verses also speak of Christ's judgment (for example, Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1; 2 Corinthians 5:10). How does John 5:30 help us to understand the work of Jesus in judgment?

Christ had put down His nature as God when He became human (Philippians 2:5–11). But He still had a special relationship with the Father. When the religious leaders blamed Him for blasphemy,³ Jesus told them that God had given Him authority to do special work as God (John 5:19–30). One kind of work is judgment. The fact that God has given Christ the responsibility of judgment shows the Father's mercy. This is because Christ has become human and understands humans. So, Jesus is in a position to judge fairly. Because He has experience as a human, Christ would not criticize a person unfairly. In fact, Christ suggests that punishment does not come from Him. Instead, sinners who do not repent punish themselves when they refuse to listen to the command of God (John 12:48).

Many know God's law but do not know how to keep it. The law is not a checklist we use to see how close we are to the kingdom. Instead, it describes different principles (rules) of love. Fulfilling (keeping) the law does not mean we obey it so that we may gain favor from God. But the law encourages each Christian to share the love of God with those who need it. As the standard (perfect example) of judgment, the law serves to measure the level of love that the person has shared with God and humans. When Christ controls the final judgment, He will judge according to God's unchanging law of love (James 2:12).

DEFINITIONS

3. blasphemy—boasting that is the same as saying, "I am God, or I am equal to God."

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Church Discipline,” pages 260–264; “‘Consider One Another,’” pages 265, 266, in *Testimonies⁴ for the Church*, volume 7.

“‘Carry each other’s heavy loads. If you do, you will give the law of Christ its full meaning’ [Galatians 6:2, NlrV]. Here, again, God has set our duty before us. How can those who claim to follow Christ be not serious about these inspired [God-given] laws? . . .

“We know very little of our own hearts. We have little sense of our own need of the mercy of God. This is why we hold dear so little of that sweet mercy which Jesus gives us. And we should give this toward one another. We should remember that our brothers are weak sinners like ourselves. Suppose that a brother has been overcome by temptation carelessly. Suppose he has made some mistake. What should we do to help him? We learn from Bible history that God used men to do a great and good work. But they sinned deeply. The Lord did not pass these by unpunished. But God also did not cast off his servants. When they repented, God mercifully forgave them. He showed them His presence. And He worked through them. Let poor, weak sinners think about how great is their own need of mercy and patience from God and from their brothers. Let them be careful about how they judge and criticize others.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, January 25, 1883.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about the above paragraph from *Signs of the Times*. Why is it so important that we give grace to those who fall into sin?
- ② Think about some well-known Bible leaders who fell into sin. Yet, God was able to forgive and continue to use them. What important lesson is there for us from these examples?
- ③ In what ways can we use church discipline while at the same time offer grace and mercy toward those who fall into sin? Why should we understand both discipline and grace as not being opposed to each other?

DEFINITIONS

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.