

THE ETERNAL LAW AND SAVING GRACE

In our last study we found that the Bible teaches the existence of, and man's responsibility to keep, the ten commandments - from Adam's day to the very end of this world. The ten commandments contain the very principles of the holy character of God Himself. If God is timeless and changeless (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), it follows that His commandments would also be timeless and changeless.

The function of the ten commandments has ever been to reveal God's character to mankind, thus showing man where he is out of harmony with God (Romans 3:20; 4:15). As "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), God has graciously provided forgiveness for sin, as we accept Christ's sacrifice for us (John 3:16). God wants sinners to believe, to be cleansed of their sins, and to accept His power which will enable them to again become like Him, to have characters like His character which has been revealed in His ten commandments.

"Law and grace"--there has been much misunderstanding on this subject. God is righteousness. God is love. God is law. God is merciful. God offers pardon, unmerited favor, grace. Law and grace are both necessary in order that we may see more clearly exactly what God is like, and what He wants us to be like. Let us see how fully we can understand this topic from God's holy Bible.

1. By way of review, what do the following Scripture passages teach us about "sin"?
 - (a) Romans 3:20 _____
 - (b) 1 John 3:4 _____
 - (c) Proverbs 14:34 _____
 - (d) James 4:17 _____

2. The Bible is very clear that "sin" is sin, regardless of whether man lived in Old Testament or New Testament times. Moreover, forgiveness for sin is found in only one way, Old or New Testaments. Faith in the innocent blood of the Old Testament sacrifice, and the Christ to Whom it pointed, brought forgiveness. Faith in the innocent shed blood of Christ will always bring forgiveness. Review this wonderful truth in these texts.
 - (a) Romans 5:9,10,17,18 _____
 - (b) Romans 3:24,25 _____
 - (c) Ephesians 1:7 _____

3. Now comes the vital question of this study. Does the coming of grace into our lives free us from keeping the ten commandments? It is in relation to this question that the writings of the apostle Paul have often been misunderstood. Paul faced some very specific and unique "law" problems in his day. For example:
 1. There were many who continued to observe the Jewish ceremonial rites and practices which had no purpose after the time of Christ's crucifixion.

2. There were many of both Jews and Christians during Paul's ministry who were trying (futilely) to be saved by their works, by adherence to traditions (Matthew 15:9), by boasting of their law keeping.
3. And there were those who were minimizing the place and importance of Sinai's ten commandments.

Paul's counsel on "law" must be understood in light of these problems, and in connection with the audiences to whom he spoke and wrote. And we must be discerning, in the New Testament, when the term "law" is used, to see if it is the ten commandments that are being referred to, or the ceremonial law (sacrifices, circumcision, statutes), or to the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) which were often called "law," or to the entire Old Testament, or even to the Jewish legal system. This may seem like a difficult task, but with careful study it can be clear to all.

- (a) What does the book of Hebrews say about the need to follow Jewish ceremonies after Christ died and put an end to that era of history?

Hebrews 9:11-14 _____

- (b) How does Paul speak of the impossibility of salvation by works in Romans 10:4? (See also Galatians 2:21.)

- (c) How does Paul speak of the ten commandments in Romans 7:7,12?

(Note: New Testament writers all clearly uphold the eternal ten commandments. They reveal to us the character of God since the beginning of earth's history, thus are eternal as God is eternal. They function to point out sin. That has also always been their function with sinners. Thus they lead us to seek Christ, Who forgives our sins and saves. And Christ's grace and love in our hearts enable us to become obedient to God's will. Obedience is the result of our dedication to Christ, thus we are not saved by what we do. We do right because He lives within us, and by His power. We have nothing to boast about, only a God to praise.)

4. With these truths in mind, we are then able to correctly understand the following passages from Romans, passages very often misunderstood today.

- (a) Romans 3:28-31 _____

(Salvation comes as we have faith in God's saving grace (Eph. 2:8). The purpose of the law of God (as in Romans 3:20) remains the same. If God could have removed the commandments, then man would not need His saving grace and forgiveness.)

- (b) Romans 6:14,15 _____

(The problem here is not a question of law, or no law. Rather, when one is forgiven, he or she is no longer under condemnation of the law. But if one sins again, the function of the law again exerts itself, and points out sin. And Jesus continues to be willing to forgive (1 John 2:1), and thus removes further condemnation. Rather than be discouraged by

further mistakes, we can always praise God for His never-ending forgiveness, and for His peace of mind that is ours as we live without condemnation.)

(c) Romans 7:13-25 _____

(God's requirements will always be at opposites with "human" desires. Our humanness entices us to go our way, not God's. We all struggle. That is, until we let God have full control. Then, with our Lord freely forgiving us, we also find the Source of both desire, and power, to follow Him in willing obedience.)

5. Re-think these four powerful verses of Scripture: Hebrews 8:10, John 14:15, Psalm 40:8, and Galatians 2:20.

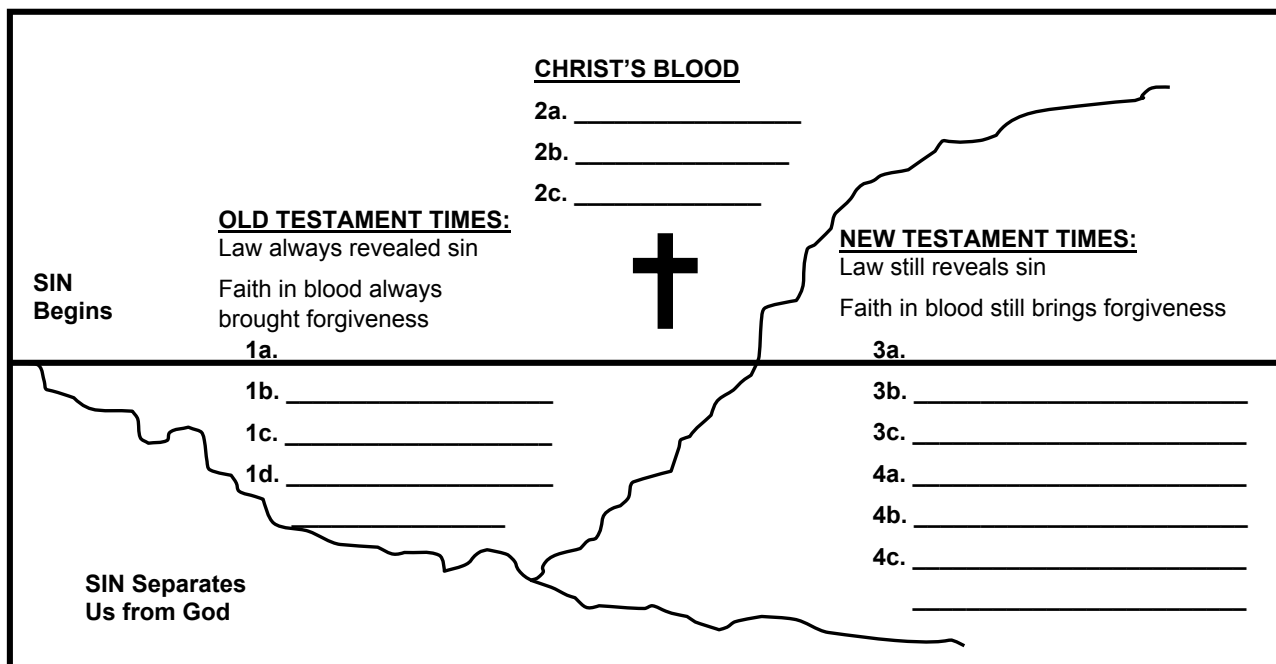
Every true Christian will discover that **God's commandments** will always serve to **point out sin**, and **reveal exactly what kind of a person God is**, what kind of a character He has. This, again, is their double function.

Then we will find, that what **God's saving grace** does, is to so **change our hearts** and **fill them with His love**, so that an **obedience that God can accept is produced**.

Grace, instead of removing the obligation to keep the commandments, actually makes it greater! But it also makes it delightful! **Salvation by grace** means that **I permit Christ to live within me daily**. And as He does, **He makes me like Himself**, - loving to God, loving to man,--which truly is to be like God is.

Christ's death did not abolish the law, rather it showed that **the law could not be abolished**. Rather it **established forever salvation by grace**, and **the need for enabling power** to come into harmony with the heavenly principles revealed to us in the commandments.

I must ask myself one question: **Will I permit Him to work out His full purpose in my life?** I receive Christ's righteousness by receiving Him as my personal Saviour. As He lives in me, by my permission (my choice), He makes a demonstration of His pure and holy life. I become a "case exhibit" to others of the saving power of God. Will I let Him do this?



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Notes for the Instructor

Purpose of this lesson: In our history, Seventh-day Adventists have sometimes been accused of proclaiming "law, law," and minimizing their emphasis on God's saving grace. Ellen White once said that we had preached (over-preached?) the law until we had become as dry as the hills of Gilboa. We have always believed in salvation only by grace, thus the emphasis we were making must not have been balanced, or at least misunderstood. Thus, we must work hard to teach law and grace in correct balance, and teach it prayerfully in order not to be misunderstood even today.

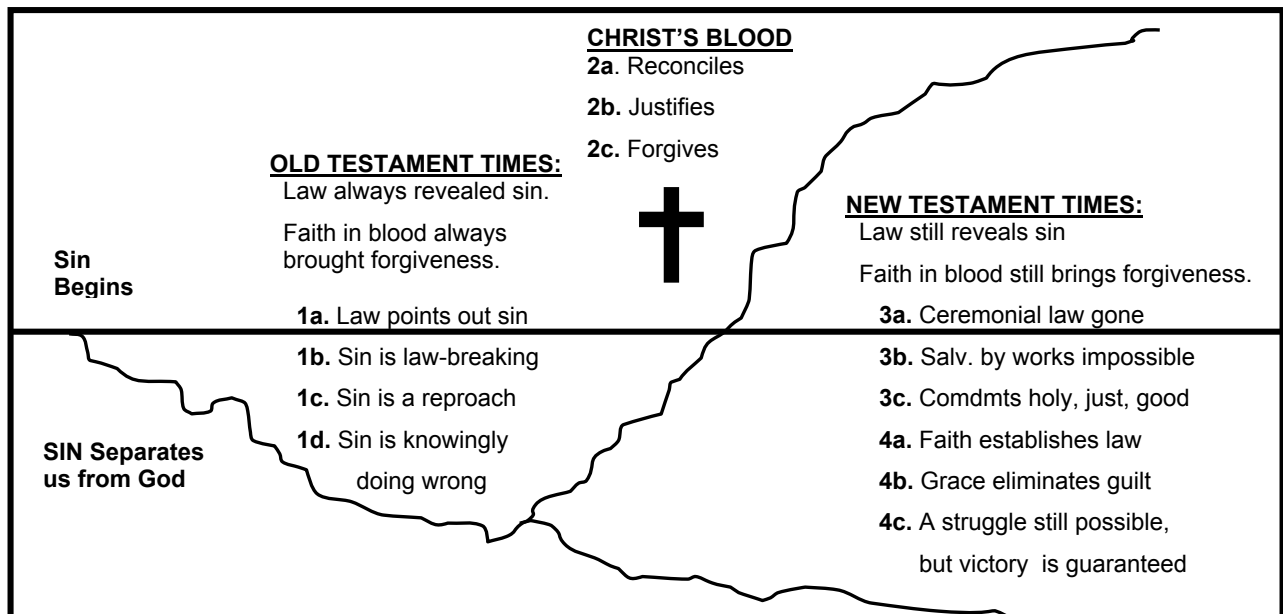
Study this "commission" on this subject very thoughtfully: "If we would have the spirit and power of the third angel's message, we must present the law and the gospel together, for they go hand in hand. As a power from beneath is stirring up the children of disobedience to make void the law of God, and to trample upon the truth that Christ is our righteousness, a power from above is moving upon the hearts of those who are loyal, to exalt the law, and to lift up Jesus as a complete Saviour."--Gospel Workers, 161, 162.

Our purpose in this lesson is wonderfully clear. Listen: "The law and the gospel, revealed in the Word, are to be preached to the people; for the law and the gospel, blended, will convict of sin."--Evangelism, 231, emphasis supplied. Our prayer must be to properly blend them.

During the study itself: Do not hurry over any text. Each needs careful explanation, and progressive incorporation into the total study. See the completed visual aid below so that you will see the beginning to the end of the overall thrust of the study.

Appeal: Question 5 contains the "germ" of the appeal. If you have time, read all of the four Scriptures. Show your student that when Christ is in the heart, there immediately springs up the motivation to accept and seek to emulate the character of the Trinity (the ten principles of the commandments).

Illustration: Continue to tie the elements of law and grace together in the illustration. Make it crystal clear.



Introduction

Romans 3:20

²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Romans 4:15

¹⁵because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.

Romans 3:23

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, . . .

John 3:16

¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1a. Romans 3:20

²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Answer: The law identifies or tells us what is “sin”.

1b. 1 John 3:4

⁴Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

Answer: “Sin” is breaking the “law”.

1c. Proverbs 14:34

³⁴Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin *is* a reproach to *any* people.

Answer: Sin damages the reputation of people.

1d. James 4:17

¹⁷Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

Answer: Sin is doing what we know isn’t good or right as revealed by the law.

2a. Romans 5:9, 10, 17, 18

⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

¹⁷For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life.

Answer: We are saved because we have faith (trust) in the way God has provided for our salvation, and that is through the death of Jesus in our place for our sins, thus we can be justified.

2b. Romans 3:24, 25

²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, . . .

Answer: God's grace provided the means for our salvation.

2c. Ephesians 1:7

⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace . . .

Answer: Jesus death makes it possible for us to be forgiven and saved.

3a. Hebrews 9:11-14

¹¹But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹²Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Answer: Jesus "sacrifice" was superior to the sacrifice of goats and calves, which actually only pointed forward to His sacrifice which indeed made the forgiveness of sin a possibility.

3b. Romans 10:4

⁴For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Galatians 2:21

²¹I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Answer: It is not possible to be or become righteous through keeping the law, rather righteousness is possible only through believing in the death of Jesus.

3c. Romans 7:7, 12

⁷What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “*You shall not covet.*”

¹²Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Answer: The law is not sin, rather it helps us identify and understand what is sin. The law is holy, just, and good.

4a. Romans 3:28-31

²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Answer: Sinners are justified by faith, not by how well they keep the law, though as a saved person, they do indeed keep/uphold the law.

4b. Romans 6:14, 15

¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

1 John 2:1

¹My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Answer: When we have been forgiven, the law no longer condemns us. It will continue to point out sin in our lives and Jesus continues to be willing to forgive us when we do slip, but continue to come to him for forgiveness.

4c. Romans 7:13-25

¹³Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. ¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin

that dwells in me. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Answer: God must be in full control of my life if I hope to truly obey they law.

5. Hebrews 8:10

¹⁰*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

John 14:15

¹⁵“If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Psalms 40:8

⁸I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law *is* within my heart.”

Galatians 2:20

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.